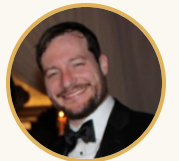




Gematria on the Parshah: Hashem's Simchat Torah

BY REB MOSHE HERSKOVITS



Why do we celebrate Simchat Torah by dancing with the Torah in a circle instead of staying up all night learning? It is well known that Hakafot represent unity. When it comes to learning Torah, people are on different levels. Some people learn more deeply, some less. But when it comes to dancing, every Jew can contribute.

By dancing together on Simchat Torah, we tap into something deeper. We tap into the happiness of Hashem. To Hashem, the greatest tzaddik and the simplest Jew are both just as precious. Each Jew has a unique connection to Hashem's Torah, and contributes something to the world that no one else can.

Rebbe Pinchas of Koretz says this is why we dance in a circle. A circle has no beginning and no end. From the center point of a circle, every line drawn to the outside is equal. No person is closer to the center than another.

There is a beautiful gematria hidden in this idea. עגול + רקוד (dancing + circle) equals 419, the same as אחדות (unity). Even more deeply, האור אין סוף (the infinite light of Hashem) also equals 419. Every Jew is a unique expression of Hashem's infinite light. On Simchat Torah, we come together through

dancing in a circle and reveal a unity that is deeper than our differences.

The gematria of הקפות (Hakafot) is 591, the same as כל ישראל (all of Israel). The Hakafot reveal that every Jew has an essential place within the circle of Torah.

WHY MOSHE BROKE THE LUCHOT

The idea of the preciousness of every Jew is alluded to in the Torah reading of Simchat Torah. At the end of the Torah, in Vezot HaBrachah, Rashi reveals something remarkable about Moshe Rabbeinu's greatness.

The final words of the Torah praise Moshe for the "great awesome deeds which he performed in the eyes of all Israel." What was this great act? Shockingly, Rashi explains that it refers to Moshe breaking the Luchot after the sin of the Golden Calf.

When Moshe broke the Luchot before the eyes of Am Yisrael, Hashem responded with a yasher koach. There is an incredible gematria that alludes to Rashi's explanation. עיני כל ישראל (eyes of all Israel), 731, is equal to the parshah of the Golden Calf, כי תשא (Ki Tisa).

Shemot Rabbah explains that the Luchot were like a ketubah between Hashem and Am Yisrael. By breaking the ketubah, Moshe prevented the document from being used against the Jewish people. Moshe was willing to break the holiest object in the world in order to protect what was infinitely holier, the Jewish people.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains the deeper meaning. Moshe understood that Hashem didn't give the Torah as an end in itself; rather, its purpose was and will always be to bring Hashem and the Jewish people together.

We have to remember that even more sacred than the Torah we carry is the preciousness of each Jew standing in the circle. The Mezeritcher Maggid expressed this beautifully: "If only I could kiss a Sefer Torah the way the Baal Shem Tov kissed the children whom he escorted to cheder."

STORY: EVERY JEW IS A DIAMOND

The Lubavitcher Rebbe was famous for standing for hours giving out dollars to thousands of people, even in his old age. Someone once asked him how he could stand for so long without becoming tired. The Rebbe answered, "When you count diamonds, you don't get tired." That is the way we should look at every Jew on Simchat Torah. Every Jew we see dancing is a diamond.

On Simchat Torah, we dance in a circle because there is no first Jew and no last Jew. There is simply Kol Yisrael standing together around the Torah. This is the true joy of Simchat Torah: realizing that every Jew dancing beside us is Hashem's most precious diamond.

For more, check out the Gematria Torah channel on YouTube!

Why Circles Beat Lines!

BY RABBI AVROHOM JACKS



We live in a world obsessed with straight lines. Everyone feels compelled to constantly move from Point A to Point B. This makes our dancing in circles on Simchas Torah seem utterly bizarre. We twirl and skip for hours, but we always end up exactly where we started. Such is the nature of a circle. Such is the nature of the holiest dances.

The straight line demands you close the deal or achieve the goal, and only then will you finally feel whole. The promise of a straight line is that the good parts are just ahead, you know, just beyond where you are now.

Then Simchas Torah arrives, and the Jewish people do something that would make no sense on a spreadsheet. We hug the Torah close and lock arms with each other, and we go

around. And around. There is no finish line in the shul. There is no front row in a circle. The little kid waving his flag and the scholar who mastered the deepest teachings of the Torah are equals here.

You don't have to earn your place in a circular dance. The first few laps might feel awkward. You might feel conscious of how you look and wonder whether you're doing it right. The trick is to keep moving. At a certain point, your insecurities should start to melt away, and what's left will be pure joy.

There is no finish line in the shul. There is no front row in a circle.

And think about what you will be holding in your hands. A Torah scroll. On Simchas Torah we will read the final word of the Torah and immediately roll it back to Bereishis. You see, the Torah is a circle too. Every ending leads us back to the beginning.

Whatever straight line has been telling you that you're still too far from where you need to be, or that you don't belong, leave it behind this Simchas Torah. Put your hand on a friend's shoulder and take that awkward first lap. At some point you will realize that the holiest dances don't need to go anywhere because the dancers have already arrived.

When You Stop Trying to Understand Everything

BY REB ADAM KLASNER



There's something strange about Simchas Torah. We spend an entire year learning Torah, analyzing it, questioning it, trying to understand it and hopefully allowing it to change the way we live. Then we reach the day when we celebrate the Torah, and what do we do? We close it. We take the Sefer Torah completely rolled up, hold it against our chest and dance.

When the Torah is open, there are differences between us. One person understands more, another understands less. One has been learning his entire life, while another may struggle to learn at all. But when the Torah is closed and we're dancing with it, none of that matters. We're not celebrating how much Torah we understand. We're celebrating that it's ours.

I think there's something here that goes far beyond Torah. So much of our relationship with Hashem can become dependent on understanding. Why did this happen? Why isn't this working out? Why is my child struggling? Why is my marriage going through this? Why did I daven for something and not get the answer I wanted? We want life to make sense, and when it doesn't, sometimes our relationship with Hashem starts to feel shaky.

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We're not celebrating how much Torah we understand. We're celebrating that it's ours.

Maybe Simchas Torah comes at the end of this entire month to teach us that there is a relationship deeper than understanding. On Rosh Hashanah we stood before Hashem and crowned Him King. On Yom Kippur we stripped everything away and faced ourselves honestly. On Sukkos we left the security of our homes and allowed ourselves to be held by something bigger than us. And then comes Simchas Torah. Now dance.

Not because you finally understand what Hashem is doing. Not because every prayer was answered or everything in your life suddenly makes sense. Dance because the relationship itself is enough. There are moments in our closest relationships that work the same way. Sometimes your child doesn't need you to understand or fix everything. They need to be held. Sometimes your spouse doesn't need an answer. They need to know you're staying close. Maybe there are moments when Hashem is asking the same thing from us.

That's what the dancing feels like. There are no explanations and no complicated theology. There isn't even an open page to study. There's just a Jew holding the Torah against his heart and dancing. After all the introspection, teshuvah, commitments, tears and seriousness of the Yamim Noraim, Hashem doesn't leave us with another question to answer. He leaves us with a dance.

Maybe that's where we've been trying to get to this entire time. Not to a place where we can finally say, "Hashem, now I understand You," but to something much deeper:

"Hashem, I don't understand everything. But I'm still here. You're still mine. I'm still Yours. And that's enough reason to dance."

After the Chuppah

BY REB YACOV ABOUDI



For seven days of Sukkot, we live inside the sukkah.

The Zohar calls it צֶלָא דְמִהִימְנוּתָא – the shelter of faith. (זוהר, אָמור, ח"ג קג ע"א)

The Arizal explains that the sukkah draws an אור מְקִיף – a surrounding light. It surrounds us from the outside, like an embrace.

But Sukkot is not only about being surrounded. Through the lulav and the ארבעה מינים, we also draw אור פְּנִימִי – an inner light.

The sukkah surrounds us. The lulav begins to bring that relationship inward. (פְּרִי עֵץ חַיִּים, שְׁעַר חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת)

That changes the way I understand Sukkot. The goal is not only to sit inside Hashem's presence. It is to allow that relationship to enter me – to move from being surrounded by holiness to actually carrying it.

Then comes Shemini Atzeret.

בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי עֲצֶרֶת תִּהְיֶה לָכֶם

"On the eighth day, there shall be an assembly for you." (בְּמִדְבָּר כט:לה)

Chazal describe Sukkot as a great feast involving the nations of the world. The seventy bulls correspond to the seventy nations. Then comes Shemini Atzeret: one bull, one smaller gathering.

Hashem tells us:

קֹשֶׁה עָלַי פְּרֻדְתְּכֶם

"Your leaving is difficult for Me."

בְּנִי, בְּבִקְשָׁה מִכֶּם, עֲכָבוּ עִמִּי עוֹד יוֹם אֶחָד

"My children, please stay with Me one more day." (ויקרא) כג:לו; סְכָה נה ע"ב

There is something deeply intimate about that.

Sukkot is full: the sukkah, the ארבעה מינים, the ushpizin, the movement, the guests.

Then Shemini Atzeret comes and so much of it falls away.

It is almost as if Hashem says: I do not need anything else now. Just stay.

The Alter Rebbe describes Shemini Atzeret with the language of marriage:

שְׁמִינִי עֲצֶרֶת הוּא עֲנֵן הַיְחוד הַתָּהוּ וְכָלֵה שְׂאֵחַר הַחֻפָּה

"Shemini Atzeret is the union of bride and groom after the chuppah." (לקוטי תורה, וְזֹאת הַבְּרָכָה, ד"ה תוֹרָה צִוָּה לָנוּ מִשָּׁה)

That image ties everything together.

Sukkot is the chuppah. The sukkah surrounds us like the chuppah surrounds the bride and groom. The makif is real. The embrace is real.

But a marriage cannot remain under the chuppah.

Eventually the music stops, the guests leave, and the couple has to begin living the relationship.

That is Shemini Atzeret.

What surrounded us now has to become פְּנִימִי – not simply an experience around me, but something inside me. Something I carry.

The ארבעה מינים already began that process by drawing the inner light. Shemini Atzeret takes it further. The embrace becomes yichud. The relationship becomes internal.

That is the difference between inspiration and relationship.

Inspiration can surround me.

Relationship changes me.

During Sukkot I ask: Do I feel Hashem holding me?

On Shemini Atzeret I ask: What from that embrace has actually entered me?

What has changed in the way I think, the way I daven, the way I speak, the way I live?

And then comes Simchat Torah.

We call people חתן תורה and בראשית. The marriage imagery continues.

We take the Torah in our arms and dance with it around the bimah.

The Torah is closed. At that moment we are not celebrating how much Torah we know. We are celebrating the relationship itself.

Before Torah is something I understand, it is something I am bound to.

A wedding is a moment. A marriage is a life.

Then we finish:

לעיני כל ישראל

And immediately begin:

בראשית ברא אלקים

There is almost no pause.

Because a real relationship is never finished.

Finishing the Torah does not mean I am done. It means I am ready to begin again – hopefully as someone different from the person who began it last year.

That may be the movement of the entire season.

Rosh Hashanah awakens the relationship. Yom Kippur strips away what gets between us. Sukkot surrounds us with the embrace. The lulav begins to bring that embrace inward. Shemini Atzeret is the yichud after the chuppah. Simchat Torah is the decision to live that relationship through Torah.

A wedding is a moment.

A marriage is a life.

The sukkah comes down. The lulav gets put away. The Yamim Tovim end.

The chuppah is over.

Now the marriage begins.

And then we return to:

בראשית

In the beginning.

But Bereishit does not begin with an א.

It begins with a ב.

Maybe that is a reminder that beginning again does not mean beginning from nothing.

We carry everything with us: the teshuvah of Elul, the awe of Rosh Hashanah, the stripping away of Yom Kippur, the embrace of Sukkot, the closeness of Shemini Atzeret, and the joy of Simchat Torah.

The holidays are ending.

But the relationship is not.

So the question is no longer only what I felt over these weeks.

It is:

As I begin anew, what will I carry forward, and what will I actually do differently because my relationship with Hashem has become part of me?

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QUESTION

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