

Simchas Torah...All Year Long

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October 3, 2023



During *Sukkos*, I got into a conversation with an acquaintance about the numerous festive events going on in my neighborhood throughout the holiday. The streets of our area are thronged every night by crowds of Jews heading straight to their Rebbes' courts, and Jews flocking from one *Simchas Beis Hasho'eva* to another to get their evening dose of joy. To paraphrase the sages' words about the festivities in the *Beis Hamikdash*, "If you've never seen it, you've really missed out." (You're invited for next year...and hopefully by then they will really be in the *Beis Hamikdash*.)

As we spoke, I added, "Of course, the high point is *Hakafos Shniyos*, in a way, because then we get another chance to dance all night." In our particular corner of the world of Breslov, we also dance all night on Rebbe Nachman's *yohrtzeit*, which is "*chai Tishrei*"—the eighteenth of the month.

This acquaintance said that she had never heard of anyone doing that. *Hakafos* she knew about; but a second set when it isn't even *yom tov* anymore, that last all night??

I told her that the Arizal had the custom of dancing all night after *Simchas Torah*. "I heard that he used to go from shul to shul in Tzfat to make sure that he was able to continue his *hakfafos* until the morning."

"But why?" she asked.

And that got me thinking... We didn't sleep all night on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, and we didn't sleep too much on *Shemini Atzeres*, and then we didn't sleep at all again the night after *Simchas Torah*—why, indeed? But there's a really good answer.

I smiled, "To draw the joy of the Torah into the entire year."

So how do we draw the joy of the Torah into the entire year? What is the joy of the Torah, anyway? In Breslov we have a catchphrase: "*A gantz yohr freilach*—Happy all year long." Most Jews know that there are times of year when joy is the order of the day—Purim, *Simchas Torah*, the festivals in general, Shabbos—but Rebbe Nachman taught that joy must be actively built all year round. And now that we're coming down off of the crest of the high holidays, I know that I have to take care not to see this time as being little more than a minute to breathe after all of the mad rush of the *yomim tovim*. This time is precious; it's the time to catch hold of all of the good influences of this first month (and the year really starts off with a bang, doesn't it?) and begin to draw them deeper and deeper into myself instead of letting them dissipate out into the void. It's time to work on being "*a gantz yohr freilach*"—happy with the joy of *teshuvah*, of Torah, of straightening out my relationship with Hashem and moving on fresh.

The joy of the Torah... My two year old was at a *hachnasas sefer Torah* (when a new Torah scroll is jubilantly accompanied

beneath a *chuppah* to its new home in a *shul*) early this week, and all week long he has been building up these interesting structures of blocks and singing snippets of the songs he danced to as the procession went out, in a blaze of music, light and a few hundred little boys carrying torches. (Is it my imagination, or only in Israel do the police not stop you from putting actual flaming torches in the hands of seven-year-olds?)

Apparently, to date, this has been one of the most thrilling, moving and monumental experiences of his short life. And all I can say when I see him is, "Hashem, help me to feel only half of what he feels the next time I see a *hachnasas sefer Torah* procession pass!" I want to always be fresh, just like a little child, and sensitive to the beauty of *Yiddishkeit*—of my Judaism—and never have grown beyond simple joy in having been given the undeserved gift of the words of Torah that are more precious than gold, than pearls and rubies. G-d chose, for His own inscrutable reasons, to give me—me!—a portion in His revealed mind and will. How great to be a member of this club, and to quote a very great teacher in the world of Breslov, all I had to do to join was be born to a Jewish mother! (We do have special dispensations for those who can lay claim to having most excellent lineage—those sons and daughters of Sarah Imeinu who come back to us as true converts, of course.)

I was privileged to spend last night at the wedding of the child of our dear friends, and that's another *Simchas Torah* as Rebbe Nachman explains in *Sichos HaRan*. The *chuppah*, the music, the bride and the groom representing the Torah and the Jewish people (as well as the Jewish people and Hashem). I felt like another sweet breath of the high holidays blowing me right along.

We go from *Simchas Torah* into *Bereishis*—we start over again, we start clean and new and get to do it right this time around, G-d willing. A new year, a new world. And we go straight from Tishrei into Marcheshvan, when our lips are

still *merachshevan* or fluttering with the constant prayers of the high holidays.

That's actually why I usually travel to Uman now (and I will be going next week, G-d willing). I want to hold on tight to my Tishrei, my Rebbe's Rosh Hashanah, so that it will carry me through the rest of the year.

Wishing everyone "a gezunte vinter"—a healthy winter. And "a gantz yohr freilach!" (And if you want to join me next week in Uman, just drop me a line. We could probably still fit you in!)

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