



שמיני עצרת שמחת תורה 5781 - Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Shmini Atzeret 2020

The Joy of Completion

The only day in the Jewish calendar that contains the word “simcha” (joy) in its title is Simchat Torah. What are we celebrating on this day? What is the source of this day’s unique joy?

While there are a variety of deep and mystical explanations, the most basic reason for the celebratory nature of Simchat Torah is the completion of the Torah. In general, people feel a sense of joy when they complete a long and difficult task and look back and reflect upon their accomplishment. We find a similar idea in the Halacha regarding the study of Torah and Mitzvot. The Nimukei Yosef explains that the joy of the 15th of Av was due to the fact that on that day the Jewish people completed the mitzvah of bringing wood to the mizbe’ach so “they would experience a great simcha.”¹ He goes on to explain that it is proper that whenever one completes a mitzvah one should rejoice and make a celebratory meal.

Similarly, on Simchat Torah, we complete our yearly reading of the Torah. The continuity of this communal reading should not be taken for granted – it takes buy in of the people and grit to make it to the finish line. Therefore, Simchat Torah is a day of great joy.

However, there is a difference between the joy upon the completion of a regular task and the joy upon the completion of a mitzvah. Joy not only stems from a sense of accomplishment but also from the feeling that one is precisely in the place and situation that one is meant to be in. People feel joy when they experience a sense of belonging and connection. Our completion of the Torah generates joy not only due to the sense of accomplishment but also that when we reflect upon that accomplishment, we realize that this particular accomplishment helps us tap into our true selves. As Jews we are naturally connected to Torah and are therefore joyous when reflecting back on a year of learning and growth.

¹ Nimukei Yosef, Bava Batra 53b (pagination of Rif).



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These two intertwined reasons for the celebration of Simchat Torah: the joy of accomplishment and the joy of a homecoming – can help explain why Yerushalayim is also described as embodying the epitome of joy. The midrash states:²

In this world, Shabbat is the “joy of the world.”³ When the Holy One blessed be He will rebuild Yerushalayim, he will restore to it all of the joy as the verse states: “For God has consoled Zion, he has consoled its ruins, He has placed its desert as Eden, its desolation as the garden of God, joy and happiness will be found within it...”⁴

The redeemed Yerushalayim contains both of the aforementioned themes regarding Simchat Torah. First, there is the joy of accomplishment. After so many years and such a long and arduous journey, the completion of our national goal to return to Yerushalayim is the source of great joy. And there is also the joy of belonging, homecoming and connection. The actualization of our long-term goal to return to Yerushalayim situates us precisely in the place where we feel most at home – Yerushalayim.

² Shemot Rabbah 52:5.

³ Tehillim 48:3.

⁴ Yeshayahu 51:3.