

# Parsha Ponders

Simchas Torah | October 17, 2019 | 18 Tishrei 5780

*Celebrating our newly attained wisdom*<sup>1</sup>

ושמחת בחגך וגו'

You shall rejoice on your festival...<sup>2</sup>

Anyone who has ever been to a Simchas Torah celebration can attest to the intense *simcha*, joy, that is present. Everyone's happiness is palpable. People can dance with the Torah for hours on end (even without the aid of alcohol). Where does this *simcha* come from? More importantly, how can we make this *simcha* last even after the festival is over? Can we bring this *simcha* with us throughout the rest of the year?

There's a story of the Brisker Rav, who on both Purim and Simchas Torah, would be seen displaying tremendous *simcha*. Immediately after Purim ended, he would go back to being his serious self. However, after Simchas Torah ended, he maintained his state of *simcha*. What was the difference? He explained that there's a *halacha*, Jewish law, on the festival of Purim to be joyful. Therefore, while he was celebrating Purim, he followed the *halacha* and had sincere feelings of *simcha*. Once the day was over, so too was the *halacha* to be joyful. He would then stop feeling joyful.

This is unlike Simchas Torah. The *halacha* to be joyful isn't found in the day itself. The Brisker Rav said it was to be found in the Torah. Since we still have the Torah after the day is over, the *simcha* shouldn't cease. While this may be a logical approach, and he was clearly in perfect control of his emotions, the average person will have a harder time relating to this approach. Many may find that whatever *simcha* they had on Simchas Torah will quickly dissipate. Is there another approach?

Let's introduce a few other questions on the festival of Simchas Torah. The predominant custom is to finish reading the Torah on Simchas Torah, and to immediately start reading the beginning of it. Why do we do this<sup>3</sup>?

Furthermore, it's often understood that the meal that follows the festivities is in celebration of the completion of the Torah. This is often known as a *siyum* celebration. What's the source for celebrating completing something from the Torah with a festive meal? The *Midrash* says<sup>4</sup> it's learned from King Shlomo, who made a big feast<sup>5</sup> after he received his tremendous wisdom from Hashem<sup>6</sup>. The problem is, Shlomo didn't complete anything at that point. He merely received wisdom. How can that be a source for a *siyum* celebration<sup>7</sup>?

In reality, the *simcha* of Simchas Torah isn't found in the completion of the Torah. It's found in starting it anew. After a whole year of intense study and public readings of the Torah, we now should have a new level of understanding. The depth of our knowledge should have reached a new level. Upon attaining this increased wisdom, now we can start again, from the beginning. Just like King Shlomo, who celebrated receiving his divine wisdom, we celebrate another completion of the Torah. The completion itself is the sign we are ready to start again, to take this newfound knowledge and apply it. This is where the Brisker Rav's *simcha* came from, and how we can tap into it. Simchas Torah is only the beginning. What follows is the true *simcha*. Chag Sameach!

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a *devar Torah* I heard from [Rav Eli Steinhardt](#) from Yeshivas Ner Yisroel, Baltimore, in 5778. After the *shir*, fellow *yeshivaman* [Eytan Sterling](#) pointed out that the same idea is found in [Harrei Kedem I § 156](#), in the name of [Rav Moshe Soloveitchik](#), the son of [Rav Chaim Soloveitchik](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Deuteronomy 16:14](#)

<sup>3</sup> The [Tur Orach Chaim § 669](#) says it's to avoid provoking the *Satan*. He would prosecute against us in Heaven and claim that now that we finished the Torah, we've decided to stop learning altogether. Immediately starting from the beginning shows that this is false

<sup>4</sup> [Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:9](#), brought by [Ohr Zaruah II § 320](#), and subsequently the [Beis Yosef ad. loc. s.v. וינוהגים](#). It's also in [Koheles Rabbah 1:1](#)

<sup>5</sup> [I Kings 3:15](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Ibid v. 12](#)

<sup>7</sup> [HaEmek Sh'eilah](#) (by the [Netziv](#)) 171:10 s.v. ויש להביא ראיה; [Harrei Kedem loc. cit.](#)