



Falling in Love with the Torah

Dancing with our articles of faith is a uniquely Jewish custom. Why indeed do we dance with something which, for the most part, obligates us? The answer lies in the Jewish DNA.

A Uniquely Jewish Custom

Tonight, G-d-willing, we're going to dance with the Torah. Everyone comes to the Hakafo dances—young and old, children and adults, we drink l'chaims, hold the Torah scrolls, hug them and dance.

Now, this celebration may seem a bit exaggerated. Not at all to compare, but with other religions, has anyone ever seen them dancing while holding their holy books? Not even in Catholic Rome do you see anything like that. And despite their having a religious procession in which they carry their icon in their hands, along with portraits of all sorts of religious figures important to them, you will not see them ever hugging their holy books.

Or, for another example, when was the last time you saw a Muslim crowd all excited and hugging their Korans and dancing with them in the street at one of their street protests?

What we do with our Torah scrolls is simply not found anywhere else.

And this is all the more true in light of the fact that Simchas Torah is not a holiday "prescribed" from Above. There's no mitzvah to dance with the Torah scroll. It's not mentioned in the Torah itself, it's not

mentioned in the Prophets and it wasn't even invented by the Sages of the Talmud.

Instead, it's only a custom created down here by us, by the Jewish masses themselves who decided to celebrate and party on "Torah Completion Day."

Not only that, but what exactly is in the scroll with which we dance? What do we find in the Torah? The book in which is written 613 mitzvos. Sometimes Jews complain that "it's hard to be Jewish"—there are too many mitzvos, and the Torah itself even writes about punishments that will befall you if you don't keep the mitzvos, G-d forbid.

So what exactly is everyone so excited about here?

Have you ever seen anyone dancing for joy while holding a printout of new income taxes?

Two Grooms; Who's the Bride?

So to explain this, let's first take a look at the two top honored bestowed upon community members in the synagogue on Simchas Torah: Chasan Torah, and Chasan Bereishis.

When the last portion of the Torah, Parshas V'zos HaBrachah, is read, the person called up to the Torah for that reading is formally entitled "Chasan Torah," or the Groom of the Torah. And as soon as the last portion of the Torah is read and the scroll is rewound to the beginning for the reading of Bereishis, the first portion, the person called up to the Torah for the first reading is formally entitled "Chasan Bereishis," or the Groom of Bereishis. (Both individuals are honored with a lengthy preamble that is recited in their honor just before they are called up. You can find these preambles in the prayer book.)

So now we have two grooms. But who's the bride here?

Well, as you may have guessed, the bride here is the Torah.

So, speaking of weddings, here's what's going on:

What's unique about the marriage between a bride and groom that's not found in any other relationship is: love. And that's what inspires such joy and happiness at weddings. It's no wonder that people spend so much money on weddings—because when it comes to love, there are no explanations and answers needed for why we dance and celebrated. It's self-understood.

And it's this same love that we have for the Torah.

Identifying With The Policy

But why do we have such love for the Torah?

To explain this, let's use the analogy of politics.

Before an election, you've got Democrats and Republicans, and you've got some people who love this candidate and some people who love that candidate.

Now, most people were not convinced to be liberals or conservatives by the candidates' speeches. Rather, when they heard one of them speak or when they discovered their philosophies, they connected with the views of that philosophy because this is what they themselves thought before that. So it's only that they now have found someone who expressed the feelings of their hearts in a way that they themselves never could have.

So now they identify with that movement or with that candidate because that movement or that candidate expresses what they always had believed before then. Ultimately, then, they have merely found a home and a group of people who think like them.

And this is what happens with the Jews and the Torah at Simchas

Torah.

In the DNA of the Jew, you'll find all the philosophies of the Torah. But G-d didn't just transcribe in the Torah what He expects Man to do—He also created Man in such a way that he will want to do those things. For example, G-d didn't just command Man to be fruitful and multiply—He also inserted the desire to have children into Man's DNA.

Similarly, G-d didn't just write in the Torah that Man should be moral and G-d-loving—rather, He inserted into the Jewish genome the need to be concerned for poor people, widows and orphans. The Jew naturally always fights for social justice—he cannot bear the suffering of the other and he shouts out against every outrage. And in like manner, the Jew naturally wants to connect and get close to G-d. He seeks spirituality. It's his natural impulse.

But what happens is that a person is born with a natural impulse to connect with G-d, but he doesn't know how to. Or, he's born with a natural impulse to help the poor, but he lacks self-confidence—he thinks that if everyone is acting otherwise, then maybe they're right and he's wrong; he starts doubting whether he's right.

But then he opens the Torah where he reads, "V'ahavta l'rayacha kamocho," or "love your fellow as yourself," and he is thrilled about this as if he's just won the lottery—because the Torah validates and vindicates what he always felt but wasn't able to prove was right.

Similarly, when he reads in the Torah portion of Mishpatim (Shmos 22:21), "You shall not oppress every widow and orphan, or, "Distance from false matters" (Shmos 23:7), or what we read in the Torah today, "Should there be among you a pauper... do not stiffen your heart and do not close your hand... you shall surely open your hand" (Devarim 15:7-8), he thrills with identification.

Same thing with when he reads the mitzvah, "On the same day you

shall provide his payment” (Devarim 24:15), which obligates one to pay his worker his wages on time without any delay whatsoever.

And same thing with spiritual matters—he finds, “Hear O Israel... the L-rd is One” and he feels that this is what he’s been looking for all along.

When a Jew studies the Torah, he immediately falls in love with it. “This is what I’ve been looking for all these years!” And so he celebrates like a groom who’s found his bride.

It’s no wonder that once a year, when he completes the Torah, he celebrates with the Torah like a groom celebrating with his bride. And so, you’re all invited to the “Jewish Annual Wedding”! Come dance with us with the “bride” tonight—right here in the synagogue.

Good Yom Tov!