



# BE A SIMCHAT TORAH JEW

*American Jews choose Yom Kippur, and Russian Jews choose Simchas Torah. Who is right? The answer lies in a story of the Rebbe, and the differences in the behavior of King Saul and King David.*

## The Russian Kol Nidre

Whether it's for Kol Nidre, Yizkor or Ne'ila, Jews who would never step foot into a shul at any other time of the year make it a point to be here for Yom Kippur. This is at least the case in the US and Israel.

In Russia, however, throughout the seventy years of communist rule, it wasn't Yom Kippur that drew the big crowds, it was Simchat Torah. In those days no one wanted to identify as a Jew. Certainly no one wanted to be caught in a Jewish gathering for this would get him fired from his government appointed job and his name would be put on the blacklist, never to be employed again. Being unemployed would make you a parasite which could land you in prison.

Despite all that, thousands of Jews poured into the shuls to celebrate their Judaism, dancing unabashedly in the streets of Moscow and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg).

## King Saul vs. King David

What is more important? To be a dancing Jew or to be a solemn Jew?

Thirty one years ago, on the first day of Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan, the Rebbe was Farbrenging in 770 when suddenly, in the middle of a song,

the Rebbe signaled to the Chassidim to whistle. 770 erupted with the shrill sound of a hundred whistling Chassidim. As always when word of this got out there were those who accused the Rebbe of being “unorthodox.” “To whistle in a shul is unacceptable behavior,” they said.

On Purim of that year the Rebbe responded to these accusations by quoting from Samuel II, “And David danced with all his might before the Lord... And David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord amid shouting and the sound of the shofar... And as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul peered through the window, and she saw the king David hopping and dancing before the Lord; and she loathed him in her heart.”

King David danced the way Jews dance on Simchat Torah. David was so overjoyed that he danced more like a Chassid than a king. When Michal, his wife, saw David’s “crass” behavior she was repulsed and she was itching to berate him, like a good Jewish wife. When he finally came home she really gave to him over the head! “How honored was the king of Israel today! My father, Saul was a very modest man but you exposed yourself in the eyes of the servants, as one of the idlers would expose himself!”

But Kind David answered her, saying “Your father’s house placed personal honor before G-d’s honor. I do not do this. I have made merry before the Lord, Who chose me over your father, and appointed me prince over His people. It is proper that I make light of myself before Him.”

Michal was “her father’s daughter.” Saul was a serious man, sometimes too serious. In fact, he would often feel crushed and his advisers had to find someone who was able to pull him out of his black moods. They found David. David was happy by nature and he would play his harp for Saul until the “spirit of evil” would depart from him.

So, here we have two kings, one who served G-d in earnest and one who served G-d with joy. Who do you think was more successful?

Saul had captured Agog the King of Amalek. The Osama bin Laden of his day fell into his hands and Saul missed the opportunity to kill him because he was so serious. Saul was indeed very meticulous which is why the royalty was taken from his family. He was so meticulous that in the end he didn't do what G-d asked of him. David on the other hand had no regard for himself. When Goliath challenged the Jewish people and their G-d little David faced him fearlessly. David willingly put his life on the line for G-d and his people; this is why he succeeded.

## **Be King David**

If we had to assign a holiday to each king, Saul would be a Yom Kippur Jew and David would be a Simchat Torah Jew. We spend Yom Kippur rending our clothes saying, "We've sinned, we've blasphemed and we're asking for forgiveness..."

Simchat Torah is nearly the exact opposite. The name says it all. You're busy all day with the joy of Torah and you don't think about yourself at all.

One of the problems of our generation is that we are Yom Kippur Jews. We come to shul around the High Holidays – only to be expected to cry about how bad we have been. What can a Jew hope for when he comes to Shul on Yom Kippur? Endless prayers and long speeches, and all of this on an empty stomach! This doesn't make for very sweet memories. So he doesn't want to come to shul anymore, until next Yom Kippur when he must come again... and the cycle repeats itself.

A Jew who comes to shul on Simchat Torah will find that there are hardly any prayers, there is plenty of food, plenty of L'chaims going around and everyone around him is dancing and full of joy. Now,

looking back on an evening like that, you have only good memories.

Therefore we must strive to bring every Jew in our generation to shul, not just on Yom Kippur, but on Simchat Torah! Let's give every Jew the opportunity to feel proud and, more importantly, happy about Judaism. Be a Simchat Torah Jew!