




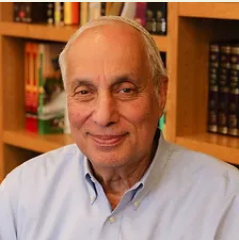




**Shemini Atzeret
Simchat Torah:
Reflections from the
Maharat Community**

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This Dvar Torah was given on Sukkot at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

Its Time To Dance

Rabba Sara Hurwitz, President and Co-Founder

I love to dance. I have always thought that if this rabbinic career doesn't work out, I could be a backup dancer on Broadway! I know that's a funny image, but the truth is, I grew up dancing. When I was younger, I took ballet, jazz, and tap and even took dance classes in college. As many of you know, I cannot sing, but I can feel music through my body. As I got older and became more religious, my dancing aspirations changed from Broadway to horas, and my new aspiration was to become a dance motivator that some people hire at bar and bat mitzvah parties. Today, my dancing outlets are fulfilled through dancing in simcha circles at weddings and not on a stage.

Dancing features quite significantly in our Torah, as a religious outlet and a form of gratitude and celebration.

Here are a few example:

In Shemot, Miriam and the women, danced after they crossed the red sea:

וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אַחֹת אַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַתֵּף בַּיָּד וַתִּצְאֵן, כָּל־הַנְּשִׁים אַחֲרֶיהָ בְּתַפִּים וּבַמְחִלֹת:

Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, picked up a hand-drum, and all the women went out after her in dance with hand-drums (Shemot 15:20).

David and Saul returned from the battle with the Plishtim:

יְהִי בְבוֹאֵם בְּשׁוּב דָּוִד מֵהַכּוֹת אֶת־הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי וַתִּצְאֵנָה הַנְּשִׁים מְכַל־עָרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (לְשִׁיר) וְהַמְחִלֹת לִקְרַאת שָׁאוּל הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּתַפִּים בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְשִׁלְשִׁים:

The women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with timbrels, with joy, and with rattles (Shmuel 1 18:6).

David danced before the Ark, and in Tehillim, he writes how people should praise God through dance:

יְהִלְלוּ שְׁמוֹ בְּמַחֲוֹל בְּתֵף וּכְנֹר יִזְמְרוּ־לוֹ:

Let them praise God's name in dance; with hand-drum and lyre let them chant such praises (Tehillim 149:3).

The word used for dancing in these *pasukim*, is generally מְחֹל, which is a token of joy and praising God. It's opposite as suggested by *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Dictionary*, is מַסְפַּד, meaning lamenting or mourning, as depicted in the *pasuk* from Tehillim

הִפַּכְתָּ מִסְפְּדִי לְמַחֲוֹל

You turned my lament into dancing (Tehillim 30:12).

It's curious then, that when we get to Kohelet, the place where dancing is placed in opposition to lamenting or mourning, the word used is not *michol*, but rather *rikod*.

עַת סְפוּד וְעַת רִקוּד:

There's a time for mourning and a time for dancing (Kohelet 3:4).

What's more, that phrase in Kohelet seems to jump out as unique.

Every other pair of Kohelet's list depicting that there's a season and time for everything has a parallel structure with the letter "lamed" before them. The Gra, the Vilna Gaon, notices that the phrase should read עַת לַסְפוּד וְעַת לְרִקוּד, with a lamed as in the beginning like the other pairs: עַת לְבָכוֹת וְעַת לְשִׂחוּק.

The Gra in a linguistic twist, suggests that that missing lamed hints at the *halakha* in Masechet Ketuvot 17a, that a person can interrupt their Torah study, their *limmud*, spelled with a lamed, on only two occasions: to dance at a wedding and [ריקוד] or to mourn at a funeral [ספוד].

A second distinction comes from R' Moshe Alshich z"l (1508-1593) who notices that our verse "A time of lamenting and a time of dancing" are different in that the other pairs are mutually exclusive.

"A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to shun embraces" can't really be done at the exact same time. In contrast, mourning and dancing are not mutually exclusive because death is an occasion for mourning but also for rejoicing in the

knowledge that you will be rewarded in the world to come (From the Stropkover Rebbe in a eulogy for R' Kalman Winter z"l, 20 Marcheshvan 5774).

Mourning and Dancing are inherently intertwined and connected.

It's as Yehuda Amichai said in his poem "Man In His Life":

A man doesn't have time in his life to have time for everything.

He doesn't have seasons enough to have a season for every purpose. Ecclesiastes Was wrong about that.

עַתָּה קָפוּד וְעַתָּה רִקּוּד:

Dancing and mourning are baked into one another.

I have never understood this more than this past year, and especially over this past week, as I watched the new Documentary called "We Will Dance Again," which depicts what happened at the Nova Musical Festival on the morning of October 7th.

In a matter of minutes, a massive 4,000-person dance party transformed into a death trap.

עַתָּה קָפוּד וְעַתָּה רִקּוּד:

And yet, when I think about the many stories of those young people, how can we ever imagine dancing again? Today, the festival site at Reim has become a memorial site, with pictures of thousands of young faces who can no longer dance.

One story that touches me deeply is about Aner Shapiro z"l, who was Hersh Goldberg-Polins z"l very close friend. They were hiding in a bomb shelter near the festival when they heard terrorists approaching. The terrorists shot at them in their hideout, which is how Hersh lost his arm. Aner is the hero who had the audacity to pick up one live hand grenade after another that Hamas had tossed into the shelter and threw them right back out. Aner's father, Moshe, spoke after a recent viewing of the movie. He said:

What Aner did, that's an act of goodness.... I think it's almost a biblical message that showed us that if you are moral in your values and you have the

love of people — because he knew only two friends that came with him in the beginning, but he knew that he had to stand and protect them and others, whatever they are, Jews or Muslims. And he succeeded for 44 minutes to stand against 20 fully armed terrorists with machine guns, with grenades, with RPGs. He didn't succeed in saving his life, but he succeeded in saving others' lives. And this is a message: If you are standing on a moral base, you can fight evil. ... It's something that is a lesson for humanity.

Ziv, who was hiding in the same shelter as Aner, shared: "Because of Aner and because of his bravery, I am here. He saved my life."

Learning about the loss of so many young people's lives, people who had so much more life to live, it's hard to imagine ever dancing again. Maybe the Alshich's interpretation cannot be. Dancing and mourning are not mutually exclusive. Where there is mourning, there cannot be dancing. עַתָּה קָפוּד וְעַתָּה רִקּוּד are distinct; there has to be a separate time for mourning and a separate time for dancing. And yet, this is unequivocally not the message of the Nova Festival survivors. Their motto is "we will dance again."

But perhaps, the kind of dancing that we have to move towards is not the dancing of Kohelet's *rikud*, but of the Torah's *Michol*. It's the dancing that the *pasuk* in Tehillim promises:

הִפַּכְתָּ מִסְפָּדִי לְמַחּוֹל לִי פִתְחַת שִׁקְי וַתְּאַזְרֵנִי שִׂמְחָה:

You turned my lament into dancing,
you undid my sackcloth and girded me with joy
(Tehillim 30:12).

Spod- lamenting will turn into *L'machol-* dancing.

What is the difference between *rikud* and *Michol*?

Rikud is generally thought to be dancing that takes place when someone is alone. *Michol* on the other hand, is dancing that is done in a circle, with others, in community. The dancing where we need to grab onto the person next to us, literally to hold each other up. That is the dancing that will wipe away our sorrow. That is the dancing that will help turn sadness into joy.

It is the dancing that Rabbi Eliezer in Mesechet Taanit (31a) promises that we will encounter at the end of days:

אָמַר רַבִּי אֱלֵעָזָר: עֲתִיד הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לַעֲשׂוֹת מְחֹל לְצַדִּיקִים, וְהוּא יוֹשֵׁב בֵּינֵיהֶם בְּגַן עֵדֶן

In the future, at the end of days, the Holy One, Blessed be God, will arrange a circle dance (*machol*) for the righteous; God will be sitting among them in the Garden of Eden, and each and every one of the righteous will point to God with his finger, as it is stated: “And it shall be said on that day: Behold, this is our God, for whom we waited, that He might save us. This is the Lord; for whom we waited. We will be glad and rejoice in God’s salvation” ([Isaiah 25:9](#)).

I don’t want to have to wait until the end of days. I want to see this vision of dancing, with God in our midst, come to fruition now.

Chen Almog, a survivor of the Nova massacre describes his will to dance again. He says: I’m here, I’m alive, and I’m smiling, and this is everything...I could be dead right now. I don’t know if it’s luck, if it’s from, you know, God, but I’m here, and I’m dealing with the things I need to deal with right now.”

Nothing can stop us or murder our spirit. Our main slogan is “We will dance again.” You can ask each member of the Nova festival, of the survivors, “Will you stop dancing? Will you dance again?”

And Almog answered for him: “I’m going to dance my whole life, and they can’t stop me.”

Not only can we mourn and dance at the same time, but we must. With those Nova survivors as my guide, I will find my way to dancing once again.

Rabba Sara Hurwitz is the first woman to be publicly ordained as an Orthodox rabbi. She is the Co-founder and President of Yeshivat Maharat and, since 2003, has served on the Rabbinic staff at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale - The Bayit.

Between the Sukkah and the Mama”d: Thoughts for Shmini Atzeret/Simchat Torah 5785/2024

Rabbanit Michal Kohane '20

October 7, 2024 showed up right between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, as if emphasizing this dialogue we’re having with the world around us, on all its levels, through the two calendars. In Israel, it was not to be missed with its ceremonies, films, interviews, stories, remembrances, and a night show of sirens and “booms.”

And yet.

October 7th is not my day. Not my date. Yes, I know, “the 7th of the 10th” became such a concept that even on the 17th of Tammuz someone said, “7 plus 10 equals 17! That’s the day the walls were breached!”...Maybe. But for me, this war started on Shmini Atzeret, celebrated in Israel with Simchat Torah, the 8th day of “assembly,, the day the world stopped.

And somewhere there, between the 7th and the 8th – that’s the whole story.

The number 7 describes things within nature. *Sheva* (7) is related to the word “save’a” – satiated, full, exact, not too much and not too little. There are seven days of the week; seven blessings for the bride and groom; seven days of mourning; seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot; seven years to *Shmita*. Seven describes the circles of life that we move through. It is our physical, “normal”, everyday existence, here and now, in this world.

But eight. Eight is a different story.

The first 8th day is the first day we were able to actively participate in this world, after the seven days of creation. This is the day of brit-mila, circumcision, the day of the covenant between us and God. The Torah portion Shmini tells about the inauguration of the Tabernacle, the point where heaven and earth connect. The

Hebrew root for the number eight, *shmona*, is shared with fat (*shamen*) and oil (*shemen*), expressing that which fills too much, which overflows and spills over. Most of all, “eight” leaves the known places in the circles of life, and goes to the unknown, like the number eight that looks like an infinity sign, going on and on and on...

The holiday of Sukkot, the holiday of all nations, is seven days long. Those seven days – wonderful and beloved in their own way – describe the orderly world and its rules. In them we have actual things to touch and hold, a Sukkah and the four species. But you, says the Holy One to us, please pause, *atzor*, stay with me for one more day. You don’t have to bring anything, there are no items and symbols. Just come as you are. It’s a day for just us; a day of going above and beyond.

While we very much live in this physical world, we are asked to remember that that’s not all there is. There is so much we don’t know and cannot understand. Maybe we forgot that. Maybe we started thinking – knowing - that Justice, Knowledge, Truth are clearly, decisively, exclusively with “us”, whoever we are, whatever side we are on. Then, it turned out that we too, did not and still don’t “know” everything. We are invited to live, not with either-or, but with both/and—to keep doing and acting and being in this world as if everything depends on us (as with the world of “seven”), and simultaneously, to holding an awareness that there is more, a part that is unknown (as in the world of “eight”).

This seeming duality might help us approach this year’s question: to celebrate Simchat Torah or to not? celebrate? There

are those who say that we can never dance again, and those who say we must keep up the festive tradition. My answer is yes to both. In the words of Rabbi Yehoshua to those who wanted to take upon themselves stringent mourning practices following the Temple's destruction: **"it is impossible not to mourn. But to mourn too much, is also impossible"** (Bava Batra 60:b). We should not cancel the holiday, but to be oblivious to everything that happened last year and since, aside from being insensitive, might mean learning nothing, and that too, holds its dangers.

Recently, I came across a collection of articles called Ha-Ma'ayan, an expanded issue on the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War. It was published in Tishrei 5783/2023, shortly before this war. Among the authors, Rav Dr. (reservist Lt. Col.) Mordechai Halperin, who was a young rabbi at the Golan Yeshiva at the time, tells about the supersonic "booms" in the middle of Yom Kippur morning prayer, the airplanes overhead, and the heavy bombing when hundreds of shells rained down on his moshav all through that afternoon.

The rabbi himself was recruited Saturday night and transferred to Sinai as the head of a rabbinic military force designated for the removal and proper burial of bodies from the combat zone. In his essay he describes countless difficult moral, human and halakhic dilemmas during the war. One of them is when he's told – on Shmini Atzeret/Simchat Torah (5733 / 1973) – to go out in order to collect bodies of soldiers in an IDF post that was conquered by Egyptians on Yom Kippur, and then again conquered by the IDF. He opens the paragraph about this horrific experience with the words: "On Simchat Torah, after t

the completion of the *hakafot* (dancing around with the Torah)"

These first few words deeply touched me. Simchat Torah 1973 was less than two weeks after the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War. We were then in the middle of a war, which began with a surprise attack on two fronts at the same time; a war that within three weeks would claim almost twice as many deaths as we have experienced in this whole last year, at a time that the State of Israel had between a third and a half of its current Jewish population. How did anyone think of *hakafot* in the midst of all this?

I wrote Rav Halperin and asked him: Were there actually *hakafot* on Simchat Torah 1973? He answered: "There were regular *hakafot* with an adjustment to the soldiers and officers' daily schedule. No one thought of forgoing Simchat Torah. On the contrary. The joy was powerful and enormous in the participants' hearts. So later, we went to the dangerous Suez Canal area without feeling fear and without dread..." I wonder if maybe history is not that different nowadays from what it always was. It's just that this time, it's ours.

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik wrote about 80 years ago: "Simchat Torah... the holiday is not called "Simchat Israel" (i.e. the joy of Israel) but Simchat Torah (that is – the joy of the Torah), and it is not (that important) that Israel rejoices in the Torah, but the main thing is that the Torah rejoices in Israel"

On the other hand, it is told about Rav Yisrael Salanter who seemed sad one Simchat Torah, that he explained to his students:

"Suppose someone had joy and sorrow from two separate matters, then the joy

from the one might reduce the worry and sadness over the other if the joy and sorrow are from the same issue, then it's different. For example, what if someone has an only child who is wonderful and beloved and his father rejoices in him, but then this child becomes terribly sick. In that case, the joy cannot relieve the sadness but rather, the greater is the joy the child brings, the greater will be the pain caused by his illness. So it is for us. Rav Salanter spoke on the Torah, which brings joy but also suffering. We can liken it to the situation in Israel: the greater the joy and pride in our homeland, the greater the distress and fear over the situation at hand.

Which means to me, especially on this Shmini Atzeret/Simchat Torah, not to choose either or none, but both.

Last year, after Shabbat and *chag*, I decided to post on facebook, asking my friends overseas to not skip Simchat Torah. Recently, a dear friend sent that post back to me. It read:

*This might sound like a crazy thing to say, considering the news, and I write it with tears in my eyes, but today, outside of Israel, is **SIMCHAT TORAH** and if you're able to celebrate safely, however you opt to do so, even if there's no synagogue nearby and you're just dancing in your home, plz, plz do so!*

You might think, how can you say this, this is no time for celebration!... so, I agree, don't drink too much; don't eat too much; let your voice choke when you sing; dance with tears in your eyes; but... don't let them win this war, don't let them take away our holiday as well!

This year, as I'm writing this between the sukkah and the *mama*"d (home safe room), I realize I may not be able to make

it to shul, but wherever I am, I hope to dance. Tears may be running down my face as sadness and joy, gratitude and fear, gloom and glory, known and unknown, all blend into one. Especially in Israel, putting Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah together means we don't have to choose. We can embrace it all in our people's "rain dance," then ask for a good year, life, and blessings as we start once again.

Moa'dim Lesimcha & Chag Sameach

Rabbanit Michal Kohane continues to be a teacher of Torah and Talmud in Israel and abroad in various settings: school, adult-ed, scholar in residence and more. She's completed her chaplaincy certification, and is now working on her official tour-guiding license in Israel. Prior to that, Rabbanit Michal was a long-time leader and educator in Northern California, serving as rabbi, Federation executive director and more. She was also the Rosh Kehila of the Prospect Heights Shul in Brooklyn. An avid learner, Rabbanit Michal holds a BA in Studies of Israel and Education, an MS in Jewish Studies, an MA in Clinical Psychology, and a PsyD in organizational psychology. She writes regularly: her first novel, Hachug ("Extracurricular") was published in Israel by Steimatzky and her weekly blog about Torah, travel and life can be found at www.miko284.com

This Dvar Torah was originally given on the weekend of parshat Nitzavim-Vayelekh

Three Confessions

Kate Rozansky '25

Since this is the season of *teshuva*, I come here today with some confessions.

One: for the past few months I've been doing a little light stalking. If you are one of the women in this community who expressed to me, even a passing interest in learning to *layn*, I have been, as the youths would say, blowing up your phone, your email, and your Whatsapp. And maybe - once or twice - even showing up at your house. I have been really weird and annoying. Because if you're not already a *layner*, I really, really want to help you become one. If you haven't started yet - there is still plenty of time for you to learn one of the *aliyot* that will allow you to *layn* on Simchat Torah. This offer doesn't just apply to women. I also believe in a robust culture of Torah reading for men.

Two: When I first started my rabbinic internship - roughly two years ago - I did not know how to *layn*. So, when I started, I also started taking lessons. And now, while I'm not an expert, I'm finally comfortable enough to teach the basics. I love it. If this is something you want - especially if you are out there thinking - oh, it's too late for me to learn this, I'll never get it now - I would be so happy to help you. Even if you never want to *layn* for anyone other than yourself. Because learning to *layn* is not only a kind of community service - but because *layning* has transformed my relationship with the Torah, with being in *shul*, and with *tefillah*.

As this week's parsha reminds us, the Torah is not only a book, but also a *shira*, a song. And the *tame'ei hamikre*, the cantillation notes, are the music. When I *layn*, I am not just singing that song, I am a *part* of that song. Knowing the notes can help you understand the meaning of the words, or draw your attention to a detail you might have overlooked. But for me, it is the physical experience of *layning* that is so magical - feeling its rhythms take shape, the way the notes have their own momentum, pushing me along through the text as I chant. I love carrying the Torah in *shul*. But when I *layn*, the Torah carries me.

Laying is a demonstration of Moshe's assertion in this week's *parsha*, that the song that is the Torah

is "not in heaven, neither" is it, "beyond the sea," but that it is "very close, in your mouth and in your heart to do." And yet this beautiful statement is also a sad one. Because God's instructions to Moshe, to teach us this song, comes in the context of preparing for a time of grief, and fear – for Moshe's death, and for a time of war. In this week's double parsha, God says:

וואנכי הסתר אסתיר פני...

I will surely hide my face...

ועתה כתבו לכם את-השירה הזאת ולמדה את-בני-ישראל

Therefore, write down this shira and teach it to the people of Israel...

שימה בפיהם.

Put it in their mouths...

We are to keep this song very close, because, it seems, sometimes, God will be far away from us - or at least, it will really feel that way. I cannot imagine what this time must have been like for Bnei Israel: the joy and anticipation of coming home, at long last. And the fear and unimaginable grief that would accompany it. I suppose then it makes sense why Hashem wants us to sing these words, not merely say them. Because in the Torah, songs convey what words cannot.

There's not much singing in the Chumash. In *Sefer Bereshit*, there is only one mention of singing. When Lavan catches up to Yaakov's camp, who are fleeing from him in the night, he says: "Why did you sneak away from me? I would have sent you away with songs and with timbrels and lyres" (I'm so sure, Lavan).

After this, no one sings for hundreds and hundreds of years, not until Moshe and Miriam lead the people in the Song of the Sea. About 40 years later, in *Sefer Bamidbar*, the people sing once more - just after Miriam dies. There is a well that has dried up. Bnei Israel sing to it, and the water returns (Num 21:17). Songs, in the Torah, are for moments of transition and change. Lavan's promised songs are songs of farewell, but also of freedom for Yaakov and his family. The Song of the Sea marks the end of our slavery, and the beginning of a new chapter that is both terrifying and transcendent. Miriam's death marks the beginning of the end of

Bnei Israel's time in the Midbar and prepares the people for the deaths of Aharon and Moshe. When Miriam was alive, our sages say, Bnei Israel miraculously had water in the desert, because of her *zechut*, her merit.

After Miriam dies, the miracles of the Midbar seem to dry up, and Bnei Israel must become singers, Miriam-ing themselves, to survive. Perhaps, in an age of *Hester Panaim*, where God's face is surely hidden from us, singing the song of Torah, can revive for us, the *zechut* of our ancestors. Perhaps our singing can help usher in an age of miracles. I'm certainly ready.

What the Torah, what Hashem offers Bnei Israel when he sees them greatly in need of *chazaq v'ematz*, of strength and courage, is a song. It's one of the many reasons I look forward to singing with many of you at Selichot tonight. Because singing together reminds us we are not alone. And singing words of Torah remind us *why* we are not alone.

Each time we sing the *shira* of Hashem's Torah, we have the chance to literally embody Torah in the world. *Layning* reminds us that, in all our deeds, we are merely instruments. It is a model of taking the Torah out of the heavens, that is, the realm of the intellect, and mixing it with our voices, our breath, our own *neshamot*. Each time those words leave our mouths the Torah is just a little bit more present in a world where it is so needed. And so - If you haven't signed up to *layn* on Simchat Torah, or if you signed up to learn the *layning* but you have dropped out - consider finding me after shul today and telling me that you are in. If this is not your year, or even if it will never be your year to *layn*, know that even just being present and witnessing the Torah being read, especially if it is being read for some of us by the first time, expands the *kedusha* of that moment. You are a part of that process.

Confession Number Three: I haven't been doing all this only because I love *layning*. This is a self-interested project. Because as we stand together on the precipice of this High Holiday season, I don't know how to enter the land of the *Yamim Noraim*. I am afraid. I keep thinking about how little I knew about what the upcoming year would hold when I davened here on Rosh Hashanah last year. How am I supposed to preside over, or even participate

in, a joyful Simchat Torah reading? I need a lot *Chazaq v'Ematz* to sing this year. Helping new *layners* sing the shira of the Torah - even if they don't *layn* it here, this time - gives me so much of that *chizuk*, that I need. Thank you.

This project is my answer to the part of me that thinks the only words that are appropriate for this Simchat Torah are those of the Mourner's Kaddish. But perhaps these two impulses, to sing and to grieve, aren't so contradictory. The Aruch HaShulchan, a 19th century halachic commentary, writes (OH:55) this about *Kaddish*:

הקדיש הוא שבה גדול ונורא שתקנו אנשי כנסת הגדולה אחרי חורבן בית ראשון. והיא תפילה על חילול שמו יתברך מחורבן בית המקדש וחורבן ארץ הקודש, ופיזור ישראל בארבע כנפות הארץ

The Kaddish is a great and awesome praise that the Men of the Great Assembly fixed after the destruction of the First Temple. It is a *tefillah* about the desecration of God's blessed name that resulted from the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, the destruction of the Holy Land, and the dispersion of Israel to the four corners of the earth.

ואנו מתפללים שיתגדל ויתקדש שמו יתברך

Therefore, we pray that God's name *will be magnified and will be sanctified and will be blessed*.
כמו שאמר הנביא: "והתגדלתי והתקדשתי, ונודעתי לעיני גוים רבים, וידעו כי אני ה'

As the Prophet (Yehezkel 38:23) says: "I will manifest My greatness and My holiness, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations. And they shall know that I am GOD."

What the Aruch haShulchan is saying is that The Mourner's Kaddish does not praise God for the tragedies we experience. Rather, when we experience times like these, times of war, and isolation, of rage and of fear - the words of the kaddish are a *demand* that God should reveal God's self to the world. When God hides God's face from us, we say, absolutely not. Reverse the process, and reveal to us, to the whole world your justice, your mercy, your blessings, and your glory.

אל־תסתַר פְּנֵיךָ מִמֶּנִּי

Do not hide your face from me!

Yitgadal v'yitkadash, right now. But that demand makes demands on us too: to become a part of that blessing. Hidden in the words of the Kaddish, and

in the songs of Selichot, in the *shira* of the Torah, and in our everyday tefillot, this question appears: How will God's Name be magnified and sanctified through you this year?

When we gather to daven, to hear words of Torah, to speak them, and to sing them, we are enlarging God's presence among us. We can do this in so many ways. Because the *Yamim Noraim* are not only a time of judgement. They are a time rich in opportunities to bring more holiness into our lives, to expand God's presence in the world. Every time we say Kaddish, we assert, and demand, something communally - that the world's sanctity *will* increase. And then, individually, we must help make it true.

Perhaps this is why *Kaddish* is a prayer that contains a call and a response. Because the mission it implies requires your participation. The leader makes the demand: *Yitgadal, veyitkadash shemay rabah*. God's name *will be* magnified and sanctified. And the community follows with demands of its own: *Yhey shlama raba mevorach, ulolam ulamay almaya*. God's name *will be* blessed, it *will*, forever, and ever, and ever. May the blessing be revealed, may we merit to reveal it –this year. This Yamim Noraim. This Shabbos. This very hour, right now.

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Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah

Rabba Anat Sharbat '15

Translated from the Hebrew. The original Hebrew version of this article can be downloaded at <https://tinyurl.com/yct-sukkot-5785-he>

Last year, on Simchat Torah, after two rocket alarms, Tzruya and I decided to go to shul, in spite of the danger, to lead the women's Torah reading as planned. On the way there, more alarms sounded, and we were forced to take shelter in stairwells of buildings that were open to us. Little did we know that while we were rejoicing with the Torah, atrocities were being committed against our brothers and sisters at the Nova festival and in the Gaza border area.

How will we celebrate Shemini Atzeret this year? How will we rejoice with the Torah after the desecration of the day and the heavy feeling of mourning and hardship? After a year of being at war, a war that exacts daily heavy costs? After failing to bring back the 101 hostages still held captive by Hamas in Gaza? With threats looming from the north, from Judea and Samaria, and from Iran? While the International Criminal Court in The Hague is issuing warrants against Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defense Minister Gallant as war criminals? When there is no answer to the ruthless murderers who are slaying our captives in Gaza?

Where will we find the strength to rejoice? The King invited us, after the guests had left, for one more day to celebrate with Him. Just us and Him, like a private after-party: "On the eighth day, you shall have a solemn assembly." For you, to offer sacrifices on your behalf (*Zohar* III, *Emor*, 104:2).

This is the festival of Shemini Atzeret, when, in Israel, we also mark Simchat Torah—"This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalms 118:24) Rabbi Avin had the privilege in the Midrash to wonder what to rejoice in more—in the day or in God Himself (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Pinchas* 782)? The Midrash brings the answer in the words of King Solomon:

"We will rejoice and be glad in You"
—in You, in Your Torah, in Your salvation
(Song of Songs, 1:4).

But what do we do in difficult years like this one? A year when joy doesn't feel natural or spontaneous? This year, we are left with hope for salvation.

The atmosphere in Israel has become increasingly tense since last year's Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. The losses, the hostages held by Hamas, the displaced from the north and south, the complex politics, and the difficult social situation all leave little room to breathe.

This Simchat Torah, we will mourn. When we read the final parsha of the Torah, we will emphasize the death of Moshe who wished to live and enter the Promised Land. We will mourn the captives murdered in captivity, the soldiers killed in battle who left behind children, wives, husbands, parents, siblings. We will mourn the victims of the October 7th massacre in the Gaza border region. We will lament the tragic fate of the people of Israel.

Indeed, in some communities, this is a tradition—to sing lamentations over Moses' death:

Said the faithful messenger:

Why am I now to die?

Because your law from Sinai, I sought out?
Because your people, from Egypt, I brought out?

Because for forty days I, myself, water and food did deny?

How, then, can you tell me now – 'Ascend the mount to die'? (*Piyyut*, Italy, 193b)

We hold prayers in "Hostage Square" with the families of the hostages and those who have come to join us. Already on the first Shabbat after October 7th, when I arrived to see the table laid for the hostages' return, I understood that this place had become a site of prayer. Indeed, everyone who

comes to the Square prays. Each person in their own way: with a prayer book, without a prayer book, with a kippah, without a kippah, in the heart, with tears, moving the lips, or with a desperate cry.

On one occasion, when Rabbi Sperber came to pray in the square, he ruled that all people who come to the square, even if they do not join our prayer circle, are considered part of the minyan, as they come to pray for the return of the captives.

This year, unlike previous years, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah will have a different focus.

This year, the story of Moshe's death will assume the place of joy in years past. In Yizkor, we will add prayers for the victims of the Nova festival and the October 7th massacre. Even the *hakafot* (Torah processions) will be, in part, slow and quiet.

This is the first memorial day for the many victims of October 7th, and it is painful, and it burns. This year, I will focus more on prayer for salvation.

And may we soon merit to see it and return to joyful *hakafot* with the Torah, on Shemini Atzeret, and with God Himself.

In prayers for the speedy return of my relative, Idan ben Yael and Adi, a lone soldier from Tenaflly, New Jersey, who was taken captive by Hamas and is alive. We pray for your return together with all the captives.

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Balancing Commemoration and Emotional Care: Helping Children Navigate October 7

Yali Szulanski '25

Last month, as we were preparing to commemorate 9/11 in our school, a teacher remarked that today's kids don't feel a connection to 9/11 in the same way we adults do, having lived through it. She mentioned that, to many children, it feels as distant as the Shoah. This comment stayed with me, especially as we prepare to mark the first anniversary of October 7, 2023—a day that is still so raw and present.

October 7, 2023, was not just an ordinary day on the calendar. It coincided with Simchat Torah, a time when we typically gather to dance and rejoice in the joy of Torah. Yet, last year, what is usually a day of pure celebration was suddenly marked by grief, fear, and uncertainty. This contrast has added a complex layer to how we think about this anniversary. As we approach it, we face the challenge of finding a balance between honoring the weight of the tragedy and reclaiming the joy of Simchat Torah, showing our children that it is possible to celebrate even while still grieving and worried.

Unlike events like 9/11 or the Shoah, the tragedy of October 7 is not in the past; it's still unfolding, with developments that change daily, even by the minute. For many families in our communities, this is an ongoing reality—some are mourning loved ones, others are worried about family members serving in the Israeli military, and many are anxiously awaiting updates from relatives in Israel. **It's an emotional landscape that's constantly shifting, reminding us that we're living through an evolving situation, not simply commemorating a past event.**

This brings a unique weight to how we, as educators, parents, and community members, approach ceremonies and conversations around this day. **While it's important to mark an anniversary that has profoundly impacted us as Jews and as part of a global Jewish community,**

we can be mindful of how we do so—especially when children are involved.

A Fluid Situation: Honoring While Protecting

The emotional implications of commemorating something ongoing need gentle care. For many children, especially those sensitive to the emotions of adults around them, participating in ceremonies or conversations about October 7 might feel confusing or even distressing. How do we help them make sense of something without closure? How do we honor the significance of this day without overwhelming them with fear or sadness?

As adults, we may feel a strong need to commemorate this moment, to process our grief, and to mark an event that has shaken us to our core. At the same time, **it's important to hold space for children's emotional well-being while still guiding them toward understanding their place in a world that is complex and sometimes difficult.** It's a delicate balance between protecting them from distress and helping them engage with the world in a meaningful way.

The Complexity of Simchat Torah: Joy Amid Grief

October 7, 2023, coincided with Simchat Torah, a day of celebration when we dance and rejoice in the joy of Torah. For many, last year's Simchat Torah was marred by the grief and horror of that day's events. As we approach the anniversary, the celebration of Simchat Torah feels especially complex; **how do we honor a holiday of joy when we are still worried and grieving?**

Children may find it confusing that a day associated with dancing and celebration last year suddenly became a day of sadness. This contrast adds

another layer to how we commemorate this anniversary. Judaism, however, teaches us to hold contrasting emotions—joy and sorrow, celebration and mourning—at the same time. **It's okay for these feelings to coexist, and we can help children understand that.**

This year, as we approach the first anniversary of October 7, we are once again faced with the question: **how do we dance with the Torah, carrying the joy of the holiday, while also holding the weight of last year's loss?** We can show children that our joy on Simchat Torah is not diminished by our grief; instead, it is deepened by it. **Our dance becomes an act of resilience, a testament to our enduring spirit.**

The Importance of Balance in School Ceremonies

In school settings, ceremonies will likely play a central role in commemorating October 7. While these gatherings provide important opportunities for reflection, they also carry emotional weight—especially for children who may not fully understand the situation. One key consideration is that children of the same age can have vastly different levels of knowledge and awareness. Some may be deeply aware, having overheard adult conversations or watched the news, while others may have been shielded from many of the details. **We can be careful not to overwhelm children with too much information or pressure them into processing emotions they're not ready for.**

This is where striking a balance becomes essential. **Educators can create a space for reflection while being mindful of each child's emotional capacity.** By keeping ceremonies age-appropriate and allowing children to opt out if they feel uncomfortable, we can offer them the opportunity to reflect without overwhelming them. **It's important to acknowledge their varied experiences without assuming they all know the same details or feel the same way.**

Clarifying Boundaries Between Commemoration and Ongoing Trauma

Since the events are still unfolding in Israel, children may feel ongoing anxiety or confusion. **To navigate this complexity, parents and educators can offer support both before and after the commemorations.** Preparing children with simple, age-appropriate explanations can help ease any confusion and offer a sense of safety. Letting them ask questions or express their feelings—whether through conversation, drawing, or other creative outlets—is key to helping them process the emotions surrounding these ceremonies.

For younger children, gentle preparation before the event and emotional check-ins afterward can prevent feelings of overwhelm. Older children may be ready for more open discussions about the significance of the day, but they also need space to process at their own pace. **Afterward, offering them time for reflection and reassuring them that it's okay to feel a wide range of emotions will support their emotional well-being.**

If a child feels safe expressing their feelings with you, your task is to create a safe container for those emotions—to hold and validate them, and help the child process in that moment. It's also helpful to remind them that emotions are fluid, not constant, and that these feelings will come and go. By being present for them before and after ceremonies, we honor the day's significance while protecting their mental health.

Empathy, Reassurance, and Openness

As we navigate these conversations, whether in school or at home, we can approach them with empathy and openness. **Children need to feel reassured that they are safe, even if the world around them feels uncertain.** At the same time, it's important to acknowledge their feelings and

offer space to process what they're hearing and experiencing.

Warm, open dialogue helps children feel seen and supported. Let them ask questions, even difficult ones, and answer honestly in ways that are appropriate for their age. **If a child asks, "Is everything going to be okay?" It's okay to admit that we don't have all the answers. But with younger children, sometimes it's okay to simply answer "Yes."** Offering that reassurance can soothe their fears and give them a sense of security.

Balancing Mourning and Celebration

Children experience and express emotions in many ways, and it's important to provide safe, supportive spaces for them to navigate their feelings.

Encourage them to talk, draw, or play as they process their feelings about the commemoration. Creative activities can be powerful tools for exploring difficult emotions without overwhelming them.

Simchat Torah offers a powerful lesson in balancing mourning and celebration. **It's a day that, even in the aftermath of October 7, remains a holiday of joy.** By dancing with the Torah, we embody resilience; we celebrate not because we have forgotten our grief, but because we carry it with us. **We can help children understand that joy and sadness are not mutually exclusive, and that it's possible—and even necessary—to find moments of light even in dark times.**

As we come together for Simchat Torah, we may do so with tears in our eyes, but those tears do not stop us from lifting the Torah high, from dancing and singing. **This is a moment to show our children that our strength as a people is not in denying our pain but in finding the courage to celebrate despite it.** We honor the memories of

those we have lost by continuing to live fully, to love, and to hope.

The Role of Jewish Identity and Community

The attacks of October 7 shook the Jewish community worldwide, and the aftershocks of rising antisemitic sentiment in the diaspora are being felt keenly. Many children may be sensing this shift, from hearing about incidents of antisemitism to noticing changes in how their families or communities speak about safety and identity.

It's important to acknowledge this with them, while also emphasizing the strength and resilience of our people. **By connecting them to the larger Jewish narrative—one that values kindness, justice, and hope—we help them feel rooted in their identity while still being part of the wider world.**

Conclusion: Balancing Reflection with Protection

Commemorating October 7 is important for our communities, as it has left a profound mark on our collective soul. Yet, it's crucial to remember that we are commemorating a live, unfolding event. **The emotional implications of this fluidity are profound, especially for children.** By approaching these commemorations with empathy, care, and thoughtfulness, we can create spaces for reflection that honor the day while also protecting our children's emotional well-being.

In Kohelet, we are taught that "to everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." **This wisdom reminds us that while grief and mourning are essential, so too is the ability to find moments of hope and healing.** As we come together for Simchat Torah, we can show our children that it's okay to celebrate even while we carry worry and grief. **We balance the weight of our collective**

sorrow with the joy of our tradition, teaching them that hope and resilience can shine even in dark times.

By marking this anniversary with both reflection and compassion, we ensure that our children are not only aware of the significance of this day but also secure in the knowledge that they are loved, supported, and safe. Let us continue to honor those we have lost, support those still affected, and guide the next generation.

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One Year Later: Thoughts on Observing Simchat Torah

Rabbi Avi Weiss, Co-Founder

Celebrating Simchat Torah this year – the one year anniversary of the Hamas barbaric attack – is a daunting task. Some have suggested suspending dancing altogether – the pain is too overwhelming. Others have suggested dancing with more spirit than ever – responding to the enemy with a resounding Am Yisrael Chai.

Still others suggest that these feelings be sequenced; that is, time set aside for mourning followed by time for celebration.

Atah Hareita: Hashem Hu Ha'E-lohim

Atah hareita, the preamble to the *hakafot*, may stir feelings of piercing lament if dedicated to the murdered on that dark Simchat Torah Shabbat a year ago; to the soldiers who sacrificed their lives defending the *Moledet* (Homeland); to victims of terror; and in the prayer, too, that survivors and the bereaved feel the love of Am Yisrael, and with God's help, be able to carry on. When reciting the first sentence, declaring "The Lord is God," participants may be encouraged to personally dialogue with God, thanking Hashem for all His goodness, and, if some wish, respectfully and lovingly asking, "Dear God, *ad matai*, when will this end?"

Vayehi Binso'ah Ha'Aron: Ve'yafutzu Oivecha

As the Torahs are taken from the Ark, we internalize the hope – "Arise O Lord, and let our enemies be scattered" – may we soon be victorious.

Hakafot

Relative to the *Hakafot* which now follow, perhaps both the mourning and the celebration should mesh together, and accompany each *hakafah*.

One suggestion may be that before each *hakafah*, congregants can form either a large or concentric or separate circles. Circles represent the ongoing cycle of life, a *galgal hachozzer*. When the circular

motion reaches the lowest level it begins to slowly, slowly, move up.

While standing still, holding hands, each *hakafah* may be dedicated to a particular group most affected by the War. The rabbi, a congregant or an eye witness could then offer a thought, testimony, perhaps based on a selection from part of the liturgy of that particular *hakafah*. While the *hakafot* liturgy describes God's benevolent attributes, it reverberates with the calling that we follow suit, fulfilling the mandate of *imitatio Dei*, walking in God's ways.

The solemnity would reach its crescendo with the singing of a slow meditative niggun, followed by either singing the same niggun energetically, or another niggun, to dancing. Here are some humble suggestions:

Hakafah Alef: Go'el Chazak

The opening *hakafah* is a general plea that God be with us, helping us, redeeming us. Note the refrain repeated for each *hakafah*, now said for the first time, "*hoshiah na, hatzlicha na, aneinu*" – terms that describe our covenantal relationship with God. *Hatzlicha* refers to God's singular contribution in the redemptive process; *hoshiah* refers to our partnering with God in this mission – hopefully leading to *aneinu*, turning *inui*, our affliction, into *oneh*, our prayers being answered. A rendition of *Am Yisrael Chai*, beginning at a slow pace and then quicker could follow.

Hakafah Bet: Va'tik Ve'chasid

This *hakafah* may be dedicated to the evacuees; the tens of thousands forced out of their homes, in effect shrinking Israel's northern and southern boundaries. The term *vatic* is used to refer to an "old-timer," including one who is native to a place. *Ve'chasid* amplifies the righteousness of the call to return for those forced out of their homes.

This *kavannah* could be concluded with the meditative song *Rachel mevakah al baneha*, leading to a more celebratory *Ve'shavu Vanim Li'gvulam*.

Hakafah Gimel: Tov U'meitiv

The third *hakafah* is the hope that all our soldiers return safely. The Talmud understands this concept, *tov u'meitiv* to refer to our petition that the bodies of slain soldiers be returned for an honorable burial. More broadly, *tov u'meitiv* expresses the prayer that all our soldiers who go out, come back whole – in body and spirit. An appropriate niggun, slow and then picking up pace could be *Ki Ve'simcha Teitzei'u U've'shalom Tu'valun*.

Hakafah Daled: Lovesh Tzedakot

Lovesh tzedakah recognizes that Israel is fighting a just war, justly, while doing all it can to limit civilian casualties. The IDF is responding with strength to a barbaric attack that the enemy has promised to repeat. In this *hakafah*, emphasis can be placed on the IDF's sacred mandate of *Tohar Haneshek* – Purity of Arms. The niggun could be a slow and then quicker rendition of *Eileh Va'rechev Ve'eileh Va'susim*.

Hakafah Hey: Somech Ve'soeid

The fifth *hakafah* is the tefillah that the wounded be healed. And so we declare, O God, please support (*somech*) the wounded. Please bless and hold up (*so'eid*) the first responders, the healers, family and friends of the injured giving them the strength to overcome. We promise to do our share, alongside Yours. A song of healing could follow such as *Hatov Ki Lo Chalu Rachamecha*.

Hakafah Vav: Podeh u'Matzil

The sixth *hakafah* speaks to the mandate of *pidyon shvuiim*, redeeming and rescuing the hostages held in suffocating tunnels. Here, we should call out the slogan of the Soviet Jewry movement, powerfully reverberating Moses' demand of Pharaoh – Let Them Go. Stories of horrifying angst of hostages

and of family can be shared, followed by the melody *Tzion Tzion Tzion Halo Tishali*.

Hakafah Zayin: Tamim Be'ma'asav

The final *hakafah* speaks to the hope that one day soon Am Yisrael and the world will be *tamim*, more whole, more united. As the prophet says, on that day the great shofar will be blown; from all corners of the world people will come to Israel, committed to make the world a better place. A slow *U'va'u Ha'ovdim* could blend into a stronger, faster *B'Yerushalaim, B'Yerushalaim*.

My father, of blessed memory, often told the story of a man who called out, under the chuppah of his youngest child, *gib mir a nagel* – give me a nail! Asked to explain, he said, life is a circle, a wheel. Coming to this country, a survivor of the Shoah, my place was at the lowest point of the wheel. But slowly, slowly it has risen and now, with the wedding of my youngest, it has reached its zenith. And so I call out: *gib mir a nagel* – give me a nail to drive it into the wheel so it remains at its highest level.

Built into life are highs and lows; no matter the strength of the *nagel*, the wheel continues its revolutions. But this year, we offer the prayer that it endlessly ascend, reaching higher and higher, and higher still.

Ve'chen yehi ratzon.

Rabbi Avi Weiss is the founding rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, Bronx, N.Y., and founder of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and Yeshivat Maharat rabbinical schools. He is a co-founder of the International Rabbinic Fellowship and longtime Jewish activist for Israel and human rights.