



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 19 | Berachah | Simchas Torah

## Beginning at the End

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## 1.

### THE JOY OF COMPLETING TORAH

Rema says<sup>1</sup> that the last festival (the second day of Shemini Atzeres) is called Simchas Torah “because we rejoice and make a festive meal for completing the Torah.”

As discussed many times, the name endorsed by Torah — although designated for a specific matter (a reason, something happened, etc.) — hints to the theme and message of that which bears the name. This is especially true since, as known,<sup>2</sup> “the name by which something is called in the holy tongue” is its life-force. It is therefore even more clearly evident that its theme will be expressed in its name.

In our case, it is understood that although the last day of the festival is called “Simchas Torah” because we “**rejoice**... for completing the **Torah**,” since the name “Simchas Torah” applies to the entire twenty-four-hour period, it is clear that the name “Simchas Torah” is connected to everything associated with this day {and not only with the Torah’s completion}.

Furthermore, the fact that “completing the Torah” takes place on this day proves that the day of Simchas Torah intrinsically shares a connection with the joy of completing the Torah.

Now we can understand why the Previous Rebbe said<sup>3</sup> that the blessing “*Shehecheyanu*”<sup>4</sup> recited on Simchas Torah is recited not only for the sake of the festival, but also for the sake of the **Torah**. For seemingly, the blessing *Shehecheyanu* is said simply because Simchas Torah is {commemorated on} the (second day of the) festival of Shemini Atzeres {which would have required this blessing regardless}. However, since it is said on a day which has its own unique name — Simchas Torah — even those matters that are thematically connected

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<sup>1</sup> In his gloss on *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” ch. 669.

<sup>2</sup> Beg. of *Shaar HaYichud VeHaemunah*.

<sup>3</sup> *Sefer HaSichos* 5705, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> {The blessing thanking Hashem “who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us to this time.”}

with the second day of the festival in exile are also connected with Torah and its joy.

[Possessing its own unique name of Simchas Torah is unlike other festivals celebrated in the Diaspora, where the second day does not have its own name. Even the second day of the Seventh Day of Pesach, which is called “*Acharon Shel Pesach*, the Last Day of Passover,” has a name that tells you it is part of Pesach — except that it is the last and concluding day. In contrast, the name “Simchas Torah” doesn’t indicate any connection to Shemini Atzeres.]

## 2.

### *SHEHECHEYANU* FOR AN OLD TORAH?

We need to clarify why the blessing *Shehecheyanu*, as recited for the sake of the **Torah**, is specifically connected with **Simchas** Torah. Furthermore, it is difficult to say that the *Shehecheyanu* is linked with Simchas Torah, since the joy of the day is on account of us “**completing** the Torah,” whereas the blessing *Shehecheyanu* is usually said for something **new**. In our case, it would have been more appropriate to connect the *Shehecheyanu* with the **beginning** of the Torah.

[Simply, we could explain that the blessing *Shehecheyanu* here is not connected with the actual reading and learning of Torah. Rather, it is an expression of gratitude for the **new joy** that the **person has** for “**completing** the Torah.” This would be similar to the rule in laws of *Birkas HaNehenin*<sup>5</sup> that one recites *Shehecheyanu* for “any happiness of the heart that a person experiences.”<sup>6</sup>

This would mean that the blessing *Shehecheyanu* {made on Simchas Torah} is recited not for the sake of the Torah, but rather for the **joy** of

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<sup>5</sup> {Lit., “blessings for satisfaction,” which include blessings recited over food, drink, and fragrance, and the blessings *Shehecheyanu*, *HaTov VeHameitiv*, blessings over miracles, and blessings of thanksgiving.}

<sup>6</sup> Alter Rebbe’s *Seder Birkas HaNehenin*, ch. 12, par. 1.

“**completing** the Torah.” However, the wording of the Previous Rebbe implies that the blessing is (at least also) **for the Torah** itself.]

We must say that although the joy is definitely due to “**completing** the Torah,” concluding the Torah is automatically connected with beginning the Torah anew. This is because it is impossible for the conclusion of the Torah to be **prolonged**, since **immediately** – moreover, without interruption – there is a **continuous** obligation to (begin) learning the Torah over again. This is actually the Jewish custom: As soon as we finish reading *parshas “VeZos HaBerachah,”* the reading “*Bereishis*” begins. Since (the joy of) the completion of the Torah is the **cause** for us to begin the Torah **anew**, we could say that the blessing *Shehecheyanu* is (automatically) connected with the **new** beginning of the Torah.

This explanation, however, is inherently problematic. Since the obligation to learn Torah is constant, and a person actually learns every day, and the Torah that was concluded is the same Torah that he will begin {studying} **immediately** afterward, what exactly is **new** that would require a “*Shehecheyanu*” to be recited? If it is due to the preciousness and importance of the Torah, then it should be, and it is the reality, (since we are not dealing with wicked people) that actually “every single day it shall be in your eyes **like new!**”<sup>7</sup>

### 3.

#### TORAH ON A WHOLE NEW LEVEL

The explanation: Since the Torah is the wisdom of Hashem, and “its measure is longer than the earth and deeper than the ocean,”<sup>8</sup> the Torah has no end. So, when we conclude the Torah, and we begin to read and learn it again, there is an obligation “to add to it”<sup>9</sup> – to begin learning the Torah in a fresh way, in a way that is incomparable to how it was learned in the previous year.

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<sup>7</sup> Rashi on *Devarim* 26:16; 11:13.

<sup>8</sup> *Iyov* 11:9

<sup>9</sup> *Zohar*, vol 1., 12b

In this, lies the joy of Simchas Torah and its connection to the blessing of *Shehecheyanu* recited over Torah: After we conclude the Torah, we rejoice for finishing one approach to learning Torah; and on account of this, we proceed to make the blessing *Shechiyanu* as praise and thanks for beginning to study Torah with a fresh approach.

{The question is, however:} Learning Torah must engage one's mind in order to understand and comprehend the material. But since the mind is limited and measured, how can we say that learning Torah has to be done in a new way that is incomparable to the previous year? {The answer:} Since the Torah is infinite, there are different levels to learning even when it comes to understanding Torah — higher and higher — to the extent that one could learn it in a new way, even a way considered incomparable to the way it was learned in the previous year.

An illustration of its infinite nature can be found in the Gemara regarding Rabbi Zeira:<sup>10</sup> “When he left for Israel, he undertook one hundred fasts in order to forget the *Babylonian Talmud* so it wouldn't confuse him” and he could learn the *Jerusalem Talmud*.

It seems odd why he needed to shut out {his mastery of} the *Babylonian Talmud*. When a person possesses knowledge and wisdom (not only doesn't it confound him, but) it enables him to reach greater knowledge and understanding!

However, this is only true, regarding {someone trying to reach a level of} understanding that is relative to and in the same realm as his previous level of understanding. But the way Rabbi Zeira learned the *Jerusalem Talmud* was incomparably loftier than the way he learned the *Babylonian Talmud* (even though Rabbi Zeira's study of the *Babylonian Talmud* was on a very high level). This is because regarding the *Babylonian Talmud*, it says,<sup>11</sup> “He has made me dwell in darkness.”<sup>12</sup> In contrast, regarding the *Jerusalem Talmud*, we say,<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Bava Metzia* 85a.

<sup>11</sup> *Sanhedrin* 24a.

<sup>12</sup> {*Eicha* 3:6}

<sup>13</sup> *Bereishis Rabbah* 16:4.

“There is no Torah like the Torah of Israel.” Therefore, his previous study would have interfered with his new study of the *Jerusalem Talmud*.

#### 4.

WHY NOT SHAVUOS?

Accordingly, we have an additional explanation of all the above. First, we need to explain the reason why Simchas Torah was not established on the festival of Shavuos (the time when we were **given** the Torah) but specifically on Shemini Atzeres, which came after the Second Tablets that were given on Yom Kippur. This is because the Second Tablets were given to *baalei teshuvah*, penitents,<sup>14</sup> and this was a greater joy than the giving of the First Tablets on Shavuos to *tzaddikim*, the righteous.

Therefore, in our case, following the fasting, forgiveness, and atonement of Yom Kippur, every Jew is a new entity. Therefore, shortly after Yom Kippur, when he finishes the Torah on Simchas Torah, he has the power to begin studying the Torah in a new way. This is like the giving of the Second Tablets through which a very sublime augmentation and level was attained in the Torah.

#### 5.

A WHOLE LEVEL

Now we can explain the connection between *VeZos HaBerachah* and Simchas Torah. In the beginning of the *parshah*, the Torah says that Hashem gave the Torah to the Jews in the manner of “**Moshe** commanded the Torah to us.”<sup>15</sup> This means that Moshe Rabbeinu had reached complete perfection in knowing and understanding Torah. Nevertheless, we learn in the end of the *parshah* that “Moshe went up from Arvos Moav to Mount Nevo,”<sup>16</sup> and according

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<sup>14</sup> *Or HaTorah*, “*Shemini Atzeres*,” p. 1779ff.

<sup>15</sup> {*Devarim* 33:4.}

<sup>16</sup> *Devarim* 34:1.

to the Arizal,<sup>17</sup> this means that at that moment, Moshe reached the fiftieth gate {of understanding} (Nevo can be read “*nun bo*,” “fifty in it”). To explain, the Gemara says,<sup>18</sup> “The world was created with fifty gates of understanding, and all of them were given to Moshe, minus one”; he was not given the fiftieth gate until his passing. As his passing approached, however, he could grasp even the fiftieth gate, which is **incomparable** to the other forty-nine gates of understanding.

Perhaps we could say that a resemblance of this applies to Jews every Simchas Torah. Once we read and learn that “Moshe went up... to Mount Nevo,” we finish our review of the *parshah* of *VeZos HaBerachah*, and we begin again to learn the Torah, but at a higher and a new level.

## 6.

### WHY DO WE ALL DANCE?

It is not clear: We said earlier that after “completing the Torah” on Simchas Torah, we start learning the Torah again on a higher level; however, this is not relevant to every Jew, but only to great minds and unique individuals. So how is the joy of Simchas Torah relevant to every Jew that they should also (celebrate on Simchas Torah and) recite the blessing *Shehecheyanu* on the Torah?

Furthermore, the joy of Simchas Torah is such that all Jews — from “the leaders of your tribes” to “your woodchoppers and water drawers”<sup>19</sup> — rejoice **equally**, as we see that the custom among Jews is that everyone dances together, etc. In light of what we explained above, however, there should at least be a difference in **the degree** of joy; and the supreme joy should be experienced by the intellectuals.

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<sup>17</sup> *Likkutei Torah L'Arizal*, “*Vaeschanan*,” 3:9; *Shelah* 369a.

<sup>18</sup> *Rosh Hashanah* 21b.

<sup>19</sup> {*Devarim* 29:10.}

Even more perplexing is the following: If the entire point of Simchas Torah and the blessing *Shehecheyanu* is their connection with the elevated state of understanding and comprehension of the Torah, then the joy should also be expressed in the same fashion. We should be occupied with studying the Torah with increase in quality and quantity, and the **comprehension** of the Torah should evoke our joy. In reality, however, we see that the joy of Simchas Torah is expressed by dancing with the **feet**. We dance and celebrate with the Torah when it is specifically closed and wrapped in its covering, in a way that we cannot even look inside it.

## 7.

### THREE PARTS TO THE BLESSING

To explain this, we first need to understand the wording of the blessing {*Shehecheyanu*}, “Who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us to this time.” The wording of blessings was codified by the Men of the Great Assembly,<sup>20</sup> and therefore, we appreciate its great precision.

We need to clarify some points about this blessing: (a) How do we understand these three expressions (who gave us life, sustained us, and brought us)? (b) The usual order of thanks is from the smallest to the largest (in the manner of “not only this, but even that”). First, we give thanks for smaller things and then we give thanks for bigger things. Since “sustained us” only means to keep something in existence, and “Who has given us life” means the existence also has life — as the Previous Rebbe explains in a *sichah*<sup>21</sup> — we should first thank {Hashem} for the fact that we exist (“sustained us”), and then add a thanks for giving us life (“Who has given us life”)!

*Rokeach* says<sup>22</sup> that the three expressions, “Who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us” are “corresponding to the verse: ‘My soul, praise

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<sup>20</sup> *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Berachos*,” ch. 1, par. 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Sichah* of the night of Simchas Torah, 5705.

<sup>22</sup> *Hilchos Berachos*, the end of sec. 371.



Hashem; I will praise Hashem in my life; I will sing to my G-d as long as I exist.” However, this itself requires explanation. **What** are these three concepts, and how are they hinted to in these three expressions?

## 8.

IS LIFE WORTH A BLESSING?

The explanation: When we speak about the praise and thanks that a person offers to Hashem for sustaining him and giving him life, {bringing him} to “this time,” one could ask: Has his life until now been good enough to warrant offering thanks by reciting “*Shehecheyanu?*” Quite possibly, most of his days were not at all enjoyable or pleasant. On the contrary, perhaps they were painful and were times of suffering. There is a well-known opinion amongst philosophers<sup>23</sup> regarding the general state of humanity. If one were to calculate the distinct moments of a person’s life, it is very possible that the times that were unpleasant and unenjoyable were more than the good times. In the final analysis, as our Sages put it,<sup>24</sup> “It would have been better for a person not to have been created.”

Even in a case when **this** person is not so certain {that his bad days outweigh the good}, but possibly, he is in a state of doubt. Then it is **questionable** whether he can make the blessing {according to halachah}.

Therefore, we first say “*Shehecheyanu.*” Just like the vitality (**literally**, the opposite of death) that a person has is **equal** from his head to his feet, and we don’t say that one part of the body has life and another part doesn’t, so too, the type of life which “*Shehecheyanu*” refers to is a vitality that permeates **every** aspect of the person, and therefore (from the perspective of Torah), he must thank Hashem.

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<sup>23</sup> *Moreh Nevuchim*, vol. 3, sec. 12; beg. of *Maamar Mayim Rabim* 5636.

<sup>24</sup> *Eruvin* 13b.

Without Torah, it doesn't make sense to say that (most) of a person's life is of such quality that warrants praise and thanks to Hashem. Even if there are more good times than the opposite, he still doesn't feel alive and energized most of the time.

Since the Torah speaks about the majority, for the majority of the day, a person is busy with mundane matters, such as eating, drinking, and sleeping, which are not activities that a person lives for, nor does he have an interest in them or get fulfillment from them. Even regarding business, a person doesn't live for doing business and enjoy it for its own sake; rather, he does it (with an external desire —) in order to provide for himself and for his family, etc.

A Jew, however, who is connected with Torah — the Torah of life — and wants to live completely according to Torah, then all that he does (thought, speech, and action) throughout the entire day is permeated with (the Torah of) life. This is because even by means of his business activities, etc., he fulfills the command of Torah (that it be done faithfully) to the extent that “**all your actions** should be done for the sake of Heaven.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, “in all your ways, you shall know him.”<sup>26</sup> It turns out that in his circumstances, the phrase “to this time” means that he aspires to live every moment of his life in a way that is infused with the vitality referred to in the verse, “You are cleaving to Hashem, your L-rd {who is} **living**.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, he can and must give thanks and praise to Hashem, “*Shehecheyanu*, Who has given us life” — “to this time.”

## 9.

### TORAH SUSTAINS LIFE

According to this, what does “who sustained us” add to the phrase, “who has given us life”? At first glance, the praise of sustenance is inferior, as discussed.

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<sup>25</sup> *Avos* 2:12.

<sup>26</sup> *Mishlei* 3:6; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 231.

<sup>27</sup> *Devarim* 4:4.

The explanation is that vitality on its own doesn't refer only to a soul clothed in a **body**. Quite the opposite: Angels have more life and a more revealed life than do souls in bodies. This is especially so for souls in heaven before they come down into this world. In heaven, they are in a constant state of (*bittul*<sup>28</sup> and) attachment to Hashem, for which reason, they have a much higher form of life.

Therefore, we recite a special praise (and an additional one) for the vitality of the soul descending into a body: "Who has given us life and sustained us." Meaning, even in sustaining the body, which **on its own** it is only in a state of being **sustained** and the spiritual vitality in it is not sensed, there is drawn the (true) life of Torah and mitzvos. Then, we express our gratitude even from the perspective of the body, declaring, "...and sustained us."

## 10.

### IT TAKES EFFORT TO CELEBRATE

Now, what is added to the thanks by saying, "and brought us?" The Previous Rebbe said in the {above-mentioned} talk,<sup>29</sup> "Chassidim used to explain 'brought us, הִגִּיעֵנוּ' to mean 'caused us toil.'"<sup>30</sup>

The virtue of being made to "toil" is unclear: Seemingly, it is something negative. Furthermore, when something, even something good, is connected to pain, we cannot make the blessing "*Shehecheyanu*." We find concerning circumcision that one reason<sup>31</sup> given why we don't say *Shehecheyanu* — although it's a very great mitzvah, and one which "they accepted upon themselves **with joy**"<sup>32</sup> — is because "the child experiences pain."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> {*Bittul* connotes self-nullification, humility, and the negation of ego.}

<sup>29</sup> {*Sichah* of the night of Simchas Torah, 5705.}

<sup>30</sup> {"brought us, הִגִּיעֵנוּ, is etymologically related to "יָגִיעָה, toil."}

<sup>31</sup> *Abudraham; Haggahos Maimonios, "Hilchos Milah,"* ch. 3, par. 4.

<sup>32</sup> *Shabbos* 130a.

<sup>33</sup> *Kesuvos* 8a.

To explain: When a person receives a gift without having to put in any effort or work, it is considered “bread of shame,”<sup>34</sup> and it doesn’t provide genuine joy. On the contrary, it triggers a sense of shame. It is different when he earns something through work and effort — what he earns becomes much dearer to him, and triggers in him a true joy. (This is like what our Sages say,<sup>35</sup> “A person prefers one measure of his own {earnings} to nine measures of his friend’s {that he didn’t work for}.”)

Similarly, when is the full joy of “*Shehecheyanu vekiyemanu*” experienced, requiring a person to give praise and thanks to Hashem? When the “*Shehecheyanu vekiyemanu*” comes through effort and toil. However, when his vitality according to the Torah in all his affairs, including his body, comes without effort, he is still missing complete joy. So naturally the praise and thanks to Hashem is also not complete.

“*Vehigiyanu*,” toil, is not only a reason and a condition to be able to give praise and thanks for **giving us life and sustaining us**, but the effort itself is the cause for the joy and pleasure. Therefore, he gives a special praise and thanks for the “*vehigiyanu*.”

## 11.

### PRAISE FOR EFFORT

Now, we can understand *Rokeach’s* explanation that the three expressions of the blessing *Shehecheyanu* correspond to “My soul, praise Hashem; I will praise Hashem in my life; I will sing to my G-d as long as I exist.” (I will praise Hashem) **in my life**” corresponds to “*Shehecheyanu*” — the life of the soul, as discussed above. “I will sing to my G-d **as long as I exist**” corresponds to “*vekiyemanu*,” because “as long as I exist, בעודי,” refers to the body which only exists — it is something secondary, עוד.<sup>36</sup> “My soul, praise Hashem” alludes to “*vehigiyanu*” — toil — because by toiling, a person invests his **soul**.

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<sup>34</sup> See *Jerusalem Talmud, Orlah* 1:3.

<sup>35</sup> *Bava Metzia* 38a.

<sup>36</sup> See *Tanya, “Shaar Hayichud Vahaemunah,”* ch. 6, (8ob ff).

## 12.

### THREE DIFFERENT TYPES OF JEWS

Now we can understand why on Simchas Torah the blessing *Shehecheyanu* is recited on account of the Torah:

After Jews have read and learned the Torah all year, and then complete it on Simchas Torah, they receive an additional new light of the Infinite in Torah.<sup>37</sup> Then when Jews begin to read and learn the Torah again, it is, so to speak, a new and higher level of the Torah. Therefore, all Jews celebrate and recite the blessing of *Shehecheyanu*. These three aspects will be experienced differently by different types of Jews:

Those who are masters of Torah and those who are devoted to its study, will experience *shehecheyanu* primarily in their studies and by understanding Torah in a new way. This is where their primary **toil** will be spent, *vehigiyanu*, in understanding and comprehending the Torah. Naturally, it will then affect their service of Hashem in regards to their bodies and their relationship with the world, *vekiyemanu*, where they spend a small measure of their time.

For those whose focus is on doing good deeds, as well as for business people, although they can't understand Torah in a new way, since they do receive a new light in Torah, it does cause them to experience something new in "*Shehecheyanu vekiyemanu vehigiyanu*" on their level: It elevates and reinvigorates the **vitality** in their Torah study and the way they conduct themselves throughout the day in accordance with Torah. This, in turn, affects an increase in the *vekiyemanu*, the life of the body, according to the Torah. Then, *vehigiyanu* — it also adds energy to their work, enabling them to have the vitality of Torah infused in all their endeavors: It does so in their labor to comply with all the Torah's directives concerning their business practices, eating, etc., and all their physical needs. And it also adds vitality to their struggle to separate

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<sup>37</sup> The conclusion of *Maamar "Lehavin Inyan Simchas Torah"* 5705.

themselves from worldly matters and to work harder in one's fixed Torah classes (which should be "fixed"<sup>38</sup> in soul as well).

### 13.

CONNECTED TO THE *PARSHAH*

Now we can also understand the connection between Simchas Torah and the recitation on that day of "*Shehecheyanu*" and *parshas VeZos HaBerachah*.

Seemingly, since Torah is understanding and comprehending, how would Torah affect those aspects of a person's life that have no connection to intellect?

We learn in our *parshah*, regarding the Torah, that "From His right hand was a fiery law for them."<sup>39</sup> *Sifri* comments: "Just as with fire, when a person touches it, it scars his body, so, too, when people toil in Torah, they are recognized as scholars by the way they walk, speak, and the way they dress in the marketplace." (Rambam<sup>40</sup> explains these details).

The question, however, is the converse. It makes sense for Torah scholars, who begin learning {Torah} in a whole new way, that Torah would spark a renewal in them and additional qualities that are recognizable in "the way they walk, speak...." For Jews who are not Torah scholars, however, what relevance does the renewal of the Torah on Simchas Torah have for them? Will it affect their lives to the extent that (they should be so joyous, to the point that) they should make a *Shehecheyanu*?

The explanation in our *parshah* resolves this issue: "Moshe commanded the Torah to us, as an inheritance...." Torah is an **inheritance** to every Jew, and the law<sup>41</sup> with respect to inheritance, the age and situation of an heir is irrelevant. Torah is something that **every** Jew receives as an inheritance.

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<sup>38</sup> {Made into an immutable, pivotal activity, whose scheduled time is zealously appreciated and protected.}

<sup>39</sup> *Devarim* 33:2.

<sup>40</sup> *Mishneh Torah*, "*Hilchos Deos*," sec. 5, par. 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Niddah* 43b ff.

Therefore, when there is a renewal of, and additional light in, Torah, on Simchas Torah, every Jew receives a renewal of, and an addition to, his vitality, for his conduct and life to be according to Torah.

Therefore, the main joy on Simchas Torah is not when we read or learn Torah, but specifically when we dance with the Torah, during *hakafos*,<sup>42</sup> by physical actions, such as dancing with the Torah itself. This is because the main joy on Simchas Torah is (not so much because of our understanding and comprehension of Torah, but primarily) that the Torah is “*Shehecheyanu*” — it enlivens us in **every** aspect of our lives, even our physical reality.

– Based on talks delivered on the night of Simchas Torah 5730 (1969) and 5731 (1970)

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<sup>42</sup> {Lit., “circuits,” referring to our dancing in circles with the Torah on Simchas Torah.}