

# Berachah & Simchas Torah: Shehecheyanu for Torah

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

The second day of *Shemini Atzeres* is known as *Simchas Torah*, “The Joy of Torah.” The *Ramo* explains<sup>1</sup> that this day is so named “because we then rejoice and feast in honor of the conclusion of the Torah” — on *Simchas Torah* we complete the Torah by reading the final portion of *Berachah*.

Thus the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the blessing of “*Shehecheyanu*” recited on *Simchas Torah* applies not only to the holiday itself, but also to the joy of concluding the Torah.<sup>2</sup> But this must be understood. The joy of *Simchas Torah* is related to the “*conclusion* of the Torah,” but the blessing of “*Shehecheyanu*” is invariably recited over something *new*.

The text of the “*Shehecheyanu*” blessing reads: “Shehecheyanu — You have granted us life, *v'kiyemanu* — and granted us existence, *v'higiyanu* — and enabled us to reach *lizman hazeh* — this occasion.”

In general, when one thanks another he first thanks him for those things that are of lesser significance and then for matters of greater import. Accordingly, the order of the “*Shehecheyanu*” blessing should have been reversed, first thanking G-d for our existence, and then for imbuing that existence with life.

When a person thanks G-d for granting him existence and life, thereby enabling him to “reach this occasion,” he may well ask: Was his life up till now truly lived in a manner such that it is fitting to thank G-d with “*Shehecheyanu*”? Quite possibly the majority of his life had not been filled with pleasure but with pain.

The blessing therefore begins by thanking G-d for granting life: Just as when a person is alive all parts of him are equally living, so too the quality of the life referred to by “*Shehecheyanu*” is that which encompasses all aspects of man equally, for which reason he is obligated to thank G-d.

Without Torah it is impossible for an individual to say that his life is full of things that cause him to offer G-d thanks; even if he enjoys mostly good times, he still cannot consider himself to be vitally alive, as most of a person’s time is occupied with food, drink and sleep, earning a living, etc.

A Jew, however, is inextricably bound to the “Torah of life,” and is therefore able to imbue *all* that he does with life; even while engaged in mundane affairs he cleaves to G-d by remembering that “*All your actions* should be for the sake of Heaven,”<sup>3</sup> and “In all your ways shall you know Him.”<sup>4</sup>

The result? “And you who cleave to the L-rd your G-d are *entirely alive*,”<sup>5</sup> every moment of every day. Thus a person can and must thank G-d for granting him life and enabling him to reach this occasion.

However, according to this explanation of “life,” the original question remains: what is there to cause a person to thank G-d for “existence;” it seems to require a far fainter degree of thanks.

Life need not necessarily be that of a soul within a *body* ; quite the contrary, the soul as it exists Above, unencumbered by a body and constantly cleaving to G-d, is considered to be much more “alive.”

We therefore give G-d additional thanks for the descent of the soul within the body; thanks that the body, which *in and of itself* can only be said to *exist* (for it lacks all spiritual sensitivity) is thus imbued with true life. We can then be grateful not only for the soul — life, but for the body as well — existence.

When a Jew lives a Torah life throughout the year, both he and Torah are imbued with a much greater degree of Divine illumination during *Simchas Torah* ; it is a new and loftier Jew and Torah, as it were. Jews therefore rejoice with Torah and recite the blessing of “*Shehecheyanu*.”

Based on *Likkutei Sichos* Vol. XIX, pp. 371-378.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. *Orach Chayim* , conclusion of ch. 669. See also *Tur* *ibid*.
2. *Sefer HaSichos* 5705 p. 55.
3. *Avos* 2:12.
4. *Mishlei* 3:6; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch* , *Orach Chayim* 231.
5. *Devarim* 4:4.

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