

A Teacher's Guide to Judaism

Simchat Torah

Simchat Torah is a day which is celebrated at the end of Sukkot during the Hebrew month of Tishrei corresponding to September or October. It marks the completion of the one year cycle of the reading of the Jewish Hebrew Bible (the Torah). After the last part is read from a Sefer Torah scroll, a second scroll is opened and the first part of Genesis (the first book of the Old Testament) is read. It is a joyous and happy festival, celebrating the importance of the Torah to Judaism.

Meaning:

Simchat Torah means 'rejoicing in the Torah'.

Traditional activities:

- The annual reading of the Torah is completed by reading the final verses of the book of Deuteronomy, and then immediately continued by reading the first verses of the book of Genesis.
- Dancing with the Torah
- Hakafot: parading the Torah scrolls around the synagogue seven times
- Treats are distributed to children

Torah reading:

Deuteronomy 33-34, Genesis 1:1-2:3

Biblical source:

Simchat Torah is not mentioned in the Torah or the Talmud and is thought to date from after the Middle Ages. On this day, the Torah scrolls are taken out of the Aron Kodesh (or Ark - an ornate cabinet that contains the sacred Torah scrolls used for public worship) and the congregation dances with them around the synagogue, usually parading them seven times around the Bimah (platform in the centre of a synagogue from which the Torah is read). The congregation then listens to a reading of the final passages of Deuteronomy (the last book of the Torah) followed immediately by the beginning of Genesis (the first book of the Torah).

Greeting: "Chag sameach" – a happy festival.

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Scottish Council of
Jewish Communities



Representing, connecting, and supporting Jewish people in Scotland
SCIO no. SC029438

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These resources describe practices that are common in the UK, but there is a wide range of Jewish traditions and observance, and different Jewish people have different levels of observance. When interacting with Jewish pupils and their parents, teachers should be aware that it is always best to ask about their own preferences.

DEFINITIONS AND GLOSSARY

Sukkot - It has significance both agriculturally and biblically as it is an autumn harvest festival. Traditionally on this festivals, Jewish people walked to the Temple in Jerusalem to make an offering. It is celebrated for eight days. People erect a booth in their garden called a 'Sukkah' meaning 'temporary booth' which has branches for a roof. Sukkot is the plural.

Sukkah



Torah – the five book of Moses from the Jewish Hebrew Bible



Jewish months (lunar calendar)

Nisan (March-April)

Iyyar (April-May)

Sivan (May-June)

Tammuz (June-July)

Av (July-August)

Elul (August-September)

Tishrei (September-October)

Cheshvan (October-November)

Kislev (November-December)

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Tevet (December-January)
Shevat (January-February)
Adar (February-March)



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