To Kiss

To Dance

To Be One

by

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To kiss is to express intimacy; to dance is to fill space with movement, with passion and joy. In small and large ways, to kiss and to dance are ways to express love and devotion, two sentiments at the heart of the *Simchat Torah* celebration.

Torah is our most precious possession, our gift. To our mortal sensibilities, Torah allows us to know God. God is Torah and Torah is God. For the Jew, to know God is to study His Torah; to love God is to love Torah.

Love is often expressed with a kiss. During *hakafos* on *Simchat Torah*, we press our lips directly to the Torah, showing our full love and devotion … for what is a kiss but a physical expression of the deepest feelings we hold? Sociologists have categorized as many as fifty-two types of kisses but to kiss the Torah is to exist in a category beyond.

Recently, I watched a *Hachnasat Sefer* Torah celebration on YouTube in which a gentile reporter observing the celebration seemed enthralled by what he was witnessing. Turning to the Jew who accompanied him, he exclaimed, “… I can actually feel the ecstasy in the air, but tell me just one thing, what is the significance of everyone kissing and hugging this Torah?”

See the celebration through his eyes! Jews on their feet for hours as fellow Jews embrace the *Sifrei* Torah and circle the shul seven times, dancing and singing throughout! Jews kissing Torah after Torah, over and over, with the true passion of a beloved. Hugs. Kisses. Dancing. Again, and again. No wedding reception more boisterous or joyous. Hugs. Kisses. Dancing.

And when the singing and dancing ends? There is more love of Torah as the actual reading of the Torah is completed! It is *Simchat Torah* and we have yet again completed the entirety of Torah, from *Bereshit* to the last word of *V’zot HaBracha*!

But wait… we are *not* done. It is not a completion we celebrate but rather a declaration of an unending devotion and love. We no sooner complete the last of *V’zot HaBracha than* we begin anew with *Bereshit*! But why? Why return to the start *right away*? Why not take a moment to savor our accomplishment? The *p’shat* is that we are never finished with Torah. God’s gift is *Ein Sof*, like God. It is only our human limitations that needs and perceives an “end”. This is why, at every *siyum* celebration as we rejoice at the completion of this *sefer* or this *masechet*, we cry out, “*hadran halach*!” – we shall return to you. There is always more, and we are eager to begin anew, to return, to learn more.

There is another reason we do not take a break; we do not want the Satan to be able to falsely accuse *Klal Yisrael* of believing that they are finished and done, as a graduate tossing his cap into the air and bidding farewell to his college studies.

Could the Satan really claim such a thing of our *Simchat Torah* celebration? In “Messages from Rav Pam” by Rabbi Sholom Smith, Rav Avraham Pam ZT’L, notes that the Satan can see and hear all the singing and dancing, not to mention all those kisses and loving hugs of those *Sifrei Torah*. Who could witness this and suggest that we are like graduates, bidding farewell to our studies?

If Hollywood has taught us anything it has taught us that a kiss can mean different things…

Citing a midrash in Ruth Rabbah (2:21), Rav Pam focuses on a dramatic and emotional moment, “And Oprah kissed her mother-in-law farewell.” (1:14)  The midrash teaches that every kiss is frivolous except for three types: The first, kisses of greatness (*gedulah*), as when Navi Shmuel took a flask of oil and poured some on Shaul’s head and kissed him. (Shmuel 10:1) When Shmuel kissed the newly anointed King Shaul, their two souls were joined, enabling Shmuel to transfer a spirit of holiness to Shaul.  The second, the kiss of meeting (*perakim*), reuniting those who have been separated, as when Aaron encounters Moshe, “He went and met him at the mountain of God, and he kissed him.” (Shemot 4:27)   The third is the kiss of separation (*perishut*). This is Oprah’s kiss, a kiss that creates the continuing bond and connection when two people must part from one another other.

No question our kisses on *Simchat* Torah are real, so why do we fear the Satan’s false accusation? Rav Pam responds that the Satan could have made the case that they are kisses of *perishut* – of separation. Goodbye kisses. I’m leaving you now, kisses. Farewell kisses.

But our kisses are *not* farewell kisses! So, to guarantee that there can be no such mistake, as soon as we finish the final words of *Sefer Devarim* we immediately read the first words of *Sefer Bereshit*. No goodbyes here! Our kisses are kisses of *gedulah*, of greatness. Our kisses create a spiritual connection to the soul of Torah itself.

Such a connection cannot be maintained by love and devotion alone. Connecting so powerfully to Torah also demands strength and fortitude. It is strength which enables us to focus on *gedulah* rather than *perishut*.  Where do we get this strength? Where do we get the fortitude to return to Torah over and over again, with no mid-winter or summer breaks?

Our strength comes from our unity. We are One People. Torah study and learning is not a “one-man band”. We are in this together. At Sinai when Torah was revealed, we stood together as one. *k’ish echad b’lev echad*, as one to receive it.

As one. Consider, is there a more indelible image than of Jews dancing? And how do Jews dance? Not individually but in a line with hands clasped or in a circle – a gathering, a community, a unity. Together.

It is our oneness that is our strength on *Simchat Torah*. It is for this reason the celebration focuses not on the learning *of* Torah but on dancing *with* Torah.  The Lubavitcher Rebbe (shared with me by Rabbi Mordechai Dinerman) insightfully noted that the Torah we dance with on *Simchat Torah* is not opened to the text but closed and clothed. *Simchas Torah*, he explained, … is the day when the inherent connection of the Jew with Torah is revealed.  The inherent connection is the idea of *morasha kehilas Yaakov,* an inheritance.  Whether a child taps into it or not, he owns the inheritance. It is his. Similarly, every Jew has a connection to Torah, and we underscore this not by reading, learning, and expounding the Torah on *Simchas Torah*, (which some can do and others less so), but by covering the Torah, keeping it closed and dancing with it, which underscores the inherently-equal connection we all share with the Torah.

There are many levels of understanding when studying and learning Torah but when it comes to dancing with the Torah, we are all equal.  Dancing unites all Jews into a single, great Chosen People.  Perhaps more to the point, the Rebbe continues that, in learning Torah, it is impossible to learn it all at once; one needs to learn one *inyan* and another *inyan*, one *parasha*, one *masechet* and so on. But when dancing with a closed, covered Torah, we dance and hold the complete Torah, from beginning to end, in its entirety.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe makes clear that what unites us on *Simchat Torah* is the dancing. In study, we are differentiated by our heads. When we dance, we dance with our feet, our unity is clear. When we dance, we are equal! On *Simchat Torah* we don’t study, we dance. In doing so, we understand that we are all capable of *gedulah*, not *perishut*. Yes, each of us must continue to grow deeper in our Torah learning and study but particularly on *Simchat Torah* it is our unity in Torah we must embrace. And to do that, we need only keep dancing.