



A Suggested *Hakafah* Ritual for Simḥat Torah 2024/5785

Rabbi Robert Scheinberg*

Communities may choose to do this ritual in its entirety or to choose any part of it. Communities may choose to read all or some of the below prefatory remarks as an introduction to the ceremony.

Introduction

Last year, on the evening of October 6, families and synagogue communities around Israel gathered to celebrate a festive Simḥat Torah.

ובשבעה באוקטובר, נהפך לאבל מחלנו:¹

Fewer than 12 hours later, on October 7, נהפך לאבל מחלנו (nehpakh l'evel m'holeinu) - our dancing was transformed into mourning.

At 6:30 AM that day began the biggest catastrophe and most horrifying act of violence in the State of Israel's history. Our people endured hundreds and hundreds of murders, sexual assaults, and abductions by attackers who indiscriminately unleashed their terror upon men and women, babies and elders, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, people of more than 25 nationalities.

At the Nova Festival, more than four thousand young people were dancing all night until the murderous onslaught began at sunrise, cutting short the lives of hundreds, and injuring and traumatizing thousands.

This Simḥat Torah² is the *yahrtzeit*, the anniversary of the date of death on the Jewish calendar, for well over a thousand people cruelly murdered in Israel. Not since the *Shoah* (Holocaust) have so many Jews been murdered on one single day.

שבת מְשֻׁשׁ לִבֵּנוּ נִהְפָּךְ לְאֵבֶל מִחֵלָנוּ:

Gone was the joy of our hearts. Our dancing was transformed into mourning.

Following such an unimaginable tragedy, how can one ever celebrate this day of Simḥat Torah again?

¹ Lamentations 5:15

² Shemini Atzeret and Simḥat Torah.

*Rabbi Robert Scheinberg is rabbi at the United Synagogue of Hoboken



And yet, all over Israel, there ARE Simḥat Torah celebrations this year as every year – just as bereaved families and decimated communities have sought to find moments of joy and comfort and beauty even during this terrible year.

In our long history, our dancing has been transformed into mourning countless times before. Centuries ago, in the Jewish community of Krakow in southern Poland, an anti-Jewish mob entered a synagogue on Simḥat Torah and attacked and murdered worshippers during the *hakafot* of Simḥat Torah.³ To remember this incident every year, that Krakow community developed the custom to pause the *hakafot* in the middle of the 4th *hakafah*, to sit on the floor and chant lamentation poems, and then to resume the standard *hakafot* with the 5th *hakafah*.

Remarkably, they continued to commemorate this incident for centuries. And perhaps it is even more remarkable that each year, after pausing and crying, they would resume the joyous singing and dancing.

Not to mourn at all is impossible and insensitive. But wisely, even after unbearable tragedies, we are urged to focus on the world's blessings and joys.⁴

At the heart of tonight's celebration, we pause to remember.

The Hakafah

Note: The traditional Ashkenazic piyyut for the hakafot do not appear to have been written for Simḥat Torah; in fact, its words are plaintive and desperate, with its repeated calls for God to save us and answer us. We suggest keeping the traditional words (repeating the first line, and then proceeding with the stanza for the 4th hakafah) and simply changing the melody of this piyyut to a melody used for somber High Holiday piyyutim.

These lines can be chanted in Hebrew and followed by the English interpretive translation and expansion.

אֲנֵא ה', הוֹשִׁיעָה נָא.

Dear God, save us now from those who seek to do us harm.

³ See

<https://www.ganzach.org.il/mentions/%D7%AA%D7%A2%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%94-%D7%91%D7%A7%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%A7%D7%90/>.

⁴ See Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 60b, in which, after the destruction of the Temple, Rabbi Joshua helps a group of ascetics to understand that they should balance their grief over the loss of the Temple with appreciating the blessings of the world.



אָנאָה, ה' הַצְלִיחָה נָא.

Dear God, help us succeed.

Help our family of the House of Israel to achieve safety and security,
to find comfort,
to thrive even in the presence of adversity,
And to sustain a country and society of justice and freedom.

אָנאָה, ה' עֲנֵנוּ בְיוֹם קִרְאָנוּ.

Dear God, answer us on the day we call.

יִוָּדַע מִחֲשָׁבוֹת, הוֹשִׁיעָה נָא.

Dear God who knows our thoughts, save us now,
from despair and from fear,
from anger and from anxiety.

כְּבִיר וְנֹאֵר, הַצְלִיחָה נָא.

Dear God who is exalted and full of splendor:
help us to succeed

in treasuring the light in the lives of those who have died
and in creating a world that reflects Your light.

לִוְבֶשׁ צְדָקוֹת, עֲנֵנוּ בְיוֹם קִרְאָנוּ.

Dear God who is robed in justice: answer us on the day we call.
Help us to internalize Your values of justice
as we bring perpetrators to justice
and commit ourselves to creating a world of justice.

עֲנֵנוּ עֲנֵנוּ בְיוֹם קִרְאָנוּ.

Answer us, answer us, on the day we call.

For the 4th hakafah, communities may wish to stand and sway in a tight circle (or series of circles) surrounding the Torah scrolls. It is recommended to sing slow songs during this hakafah, which could include some of the following:

- *Esa einai*
- *Min ha-meitzar*
- *L'ma-an aḥai v're-ai*
- *Ozi v'zimrat yah*
- *Aḥeinu kol beit yisrael*



To conclude the 4th hakafah and to transition back into the rest of the hakafot, the following words can be recited:

אֲבִינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים, עֲנֵנוּ בְּיוֹם קִרְאָנוּ, כִּי בִצְרָה גְדוֹלָה אָנֹכֵנוּ.
 הָיָה נָא קְרוֹב לְשׁוֹעֲתֵנוּ. יְהִינָא חֲסִדְךָ לְנַחֲמָנוּ.
 וַיְקִים בָּנוּ דְּבַר הָאֱמוּנָה בְּשִׁירֵי עֶזְךָ —
 הַפִּכְתָּ מִסִּפְדִּי לְמַחֲוֹל לִי פִתְחָתָהּ שִׁקִּי וְתִאֲזַנֵּנִי שְׂמֵחָה:

Dear God, answer us on the day we call to You, at this time of our deep crisis.

Be near to us as we cry, and comfort us with Your love and kindness.

and may the words of the Psalms be fulfilled for us and all of Israel:

“You have turned my mourning into dancing;

You have removed my sackcloth and robed me in joy [*simḥah*].”⁵

Am Yisrael Hai can be sung as a transition to the 5th hakafah.

⁵ Psalms 30:12