

Simchat Torah

שמחת תורה



What is Simchat Torah?

Simchat Torah, literally "Joy of Torah," celebrates the completion and renewal of our annual Torah reading cycle. Each week, a designated portion of the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) is read in the synagogue. On Simchat Torah, we finish reading from Deuteronomy and immediately begin again with Genesis. By dedicating a whole holiday to marking this moment, we affirm the centrality of Torah in Jewish life. Unlike many other Jewish holidays whose rituals are home based, Simchat Torah celebrations are centered in the synagogue. The end and beginning of the Torah are read, and the community dances with the Torah scrolls. Like all holidays, the lighting of candles, kiddush, and festive meal are a mitzvah and encouraged at home! Many also light a yizkor candle before lighting the holiday candles.

What is Sh'mini Atzeret?

Sh'mini Atzeret is the concluding day of Sukkot and actually predates Simchat Torah as a holiday! Immediately following the instructions about the seven days of Sukkot, the Torah tells us, "On the eighth day (*ba'yom ha'shmini atzeret*) you shall hold a solemn gathering; you shall not work at your occupations" (Numbers 29:35). *Sh'mini* means "eighth" and *Atzeret* means "gathering" or "stopping." It is the *chag* (festival) that "stops" or completes Sukkot. Sh'mini Atzeret has almost no additional rituals. When an extra day was added to most holidays in the calendar, the Jewish community didn't know what to do with two days of "the eighth day of gathering." So, in the Middle Ages, they invented Simchat Torah as a celebration held on the 2nd day. For Israeli Jews and Reform Jews who only celebrate one day, that one day is now *both* Sh'mini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. At Mount Zion, we focus on Simchat Torah in the evening and Sh'mini Atzeret in the morning.

Spotlight on Services

Spotlight on Yizkor

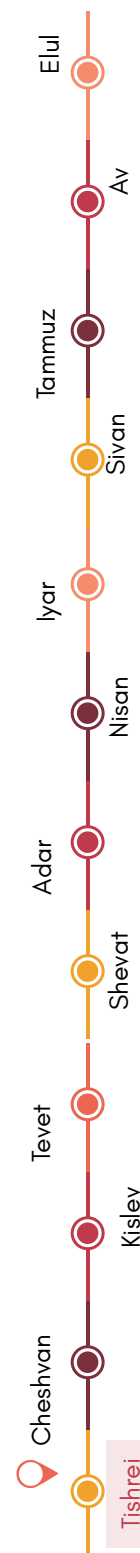
You may recognize the term "Yizkor" from Yom Kippur, but did you know that we recite these memorial prayers four times a year? Yizkor is recited on Yom Kippur, Sh'mini Atzeret/Simchat Torah, the last day of Passover, and Shavuot. Yizkor means "may [God] remember," from the Hebrew root *zachor*; reciting these prayers is a way of honoring and remembering loved ones.

Who are you remembering this year? How might you honor them during this festival season?

Spotlight on Hallel

Hallel is the compilation of psalms recited during morning services on Jewish festivals and observances throughout the year, including Sh'mini Atzeret/Simchat Torah. Hallel is the Hebrew word for "praise," reflecting the theme of gratitude thread through many of the psalms. It is also recited on the first day of Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot and Chanukah. A shortened version, known colloquially as "Half Hallel," is recited on the last six days of Passover and Rosh Chodesh, the celebration of the new Hebrew month. Hallel is often sung with much enthusiasm and upbeat tunes. Get a taste of Hallel tunes through recordings by Hadar fellows, a Jewish learning center at soundcloud.com/anat-hochberg/sets/hadar-hallel

How do you express praise and gratitude? What songs or tunes fill you with joy?





Featured Cookbook

Feeding Women of the Bible, Feeding Ourselves:

A Jewish Food Hero Cookbook

By Kenden Alford

Feed your mind and your heart with this cookbook, which features a short, compelling narrative of 20 female biblical heroines from the Hebrew bible, paired with plant-based recipes inspired by the characters' experiences.



Resource Recommendation

As we progress through the Torah this year, follow along with Devash, a weekly parsha (Torah portion) magazine. Devash is designed for kids ages 7-11 to read independently or together with families and teachers, and covers a range of topics that are informative for all ages. [Access it for free online at hadar.org](https://www.hadar.org/devash) or [subscribe to get hard copies delivered](#).



Musical Moment

Get in the joyful spirit of Simchat Torah by listening to this Spotify playlist created by Cantor Spilker!

[Find it on our Simchat Torah page at mzion.org.](#)



What to Expect When You're Expecting Simchat Torah

What do we do on Simchat Torah?

At Mount Zion, we celebrate Simchat Torah as an intergenerational community through an evening service filled with dancing and a morning service focused on memory.. You can expect a high energy atmosphere of joy for much of the evening. After a brief service, we take our Torah scrolls out from the ark and dance around the synagogue seven times, accompanied by live music. During these seven *hakafot* ("circles"), everyone has the opportunity to carry a Torah, symbolic of the way in which Torah can be shared by all. No matter how old or young, how new to Torah learning or familiar, you can celebrate the Torah through dancing! The morning service contains both joyful moments (like singing Hallel) and reflective moments (like reciting Yizkor).

What are these words we keep saying?!

At the beginning of each *hakafah*, we recite words from Psalm 118. The cantor calls out the words, "*Ana Adonai hoshiah Na*"--Please God save us, and "*Ana Adona hatzlicha na*"--Please God, give us success. We respond, "*Aneinu v'Yom Kor'einu*"--Please God, answer us on the day we call. The practice of reciting these verses dates back to Temple times and is remembered in the *Mishnah (Sukkah 4:5)*. We also sing several songs while we're dancing. Join in the words or just sing "yai dai dai" with equal enthusiasm!

“— A memory from Simchat Torah...

Sitting in the middle and seeing all of Torah literally unfolding around me. It was just so magical to be wrapped in Torah.

— Owen Erickson, Mount Zion member (age 11)

