

# 12.

## Simchat Torah

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### Celebrating Commitment

*Second Time's a Charm*



*In honor of our dedicated colleague Rabbi Zalman Levitin on the occasion of his birthday on Tishrei 23.*

*May he go from strength to strength and enjoy good health, happiness, nachat from his loved ones, and success in all of his endeavors.*

## HOLIDAY OVERVIEW

### *Sukkot*

For forty years, as our ancestors traversed the Sinai Desert, following the Exodus from Egypt, miraculous “Clouds of Glory” surrounded and hovered over them, shielding them from the dangers and discomforts of the desert. Ever since, we remember G-d’s kindness and reaffirm our trust in His providence by dwelling in a sukkah—a hut of temporary construction with a roof covering of branches—for the duration of the Sukkot festival (on the Jewish calendar Tishrei 15–21). For seven days and nights we eat all our meals in the sukkah and otherwise regard it as our home.

Another Sukkot observance is the taking of the Four Kinds: an *etrog* (citron), a *lulav* (palm frond), three *hadassim* (myrtle twigs), and

two *aravot* (willow twigs). On each day of the festival (except Shabbat), we take the Four Kinds, recite a blessing over them, bring them together in our hands, and wave them in all six directions: right, left, forward, up, down, and to the back. Our sages in the Midrash tell us that the Four Kinds represent the various types and personalities that comprise the community of Israel, whose intrinsic unity we emphasize on Sukkot.

Sukkot is also called “the time of our Joy”; indeed, a special joy characterizes the festival. Nightly water-drawing celebrations, reminiscent of the evening-to-dawn festivities held in the Holy Temple in preparation for the drawing of water for use in the festival service, fill the synagogues

and streets with song, music, and dance until the wee hours of the morning.

The seventh day of Sukkot is called Hoshana Rabah (“Great Salvation”) and

closes the period of Divine judgment begun on Rosh Hashanah. A special observance is the *aravah*—the taking of a bundle of willow branches.

### *Simchat Torah*

The holiday of Sukkot is followed by an independent holiday called Shemini Atzeret. In Israel, this is a one-day holiday; in the Diaspora it is a two-day holiday, and the second day is known as Simchat Torah. This holiday is characterized by utterly unbridled joy, which surpasses even the joy of Sukkot. The joy reaches its climax on Simchat Torah, when we celebrate the conclusion—and restart—of the annual Torah-reading cycle.

These two days constitute a major holiday, when most forms of work are

prohibited. The special joy of this holiday celebrates the conclusion—and restart—of the annual Torah-reading cycle. On the preceding nights, women and girls light candles, reciting the appropriate blessings, and we enjoy nightly and daily festive meals, accompanied by *kidush*. We don’t go to work, drive, write, or switch on or off electric devices. We are permitted to cook and to carry outdoors (unless it is also Shabbat).

The first day, Shemini Atzeret, features the prayer for rain, officially

commemorating the start of the Mediterranean (i.e., Israeli) rainy season, and the Yizkor prayer (supplicating G-d to remember the souls of the departed).

We no longer take the Four Kinds, and we no longer mention Sukkot in the day's prayers; in the Diaspora, however, we do still eat in the sukkah (but without reciting the blessing on it).

The highlight of the second day, Simchat Torah ("The Joy of the Torah"), is the *hakafot*, held on both the eve and the morning of Simchat Torah, in which we march and dance with the Torah scrolls around the reading table in the synagogue. (In many synagogues, *hakafot* are conducted also on the eve of Shemini Atzeret.)

On this joyous day when we conclude the Torah, it is customary for every man to take part in the celebration by receiving an aliyah. The children, too, receive an aliyah!

After the final aliyah of the Torah, we immediately begin a new cycle from the beginning of Genesis (from a second Torah scroll); this is because as soon as we conclude studying the Torah, G-d's infinite wisdom, on one level, we immediately start again, this time to discover new and loftier interpretations.

(In the Land of Israel, the celebration and customs of these two days are compressed into one day.)

## I. WHEN SOUL MEETS SOLE

### *The Origins of Simchat Torah*

#### TEXT 1

RABBI MOSHE ISSERLIS, GLOSSES TO THE  
SHULCHAN ARUCH, ORACH CHAYIM 669

וקורין יום טוב האחרון "שמחת תורה", לפי ששמחין ועושין  
בו סעודת משתה לגמרה של תורה. ונוהגין שהמסיים  
התורה והמתחיל בראשית נודרים נדבות, וקוראים לאחרים  
לעשות משתה.

ועוד נהגו במדינות אלו, להוציא בשמחת תורה, ערבית ושחרית,  
כל ספרי תורה שבהיכל, ואומרים זמירות ותשבחות, וכל מקום  
לפי מנהגו.

ועוד נהגו להקיף עם ספרי התורה הבימה שבבית הכנסת, כמו  
שמקיפים עם הלולב, והכל משום שמחה.

**Rabbi Moshe Isserlis  
(Rama)**  
1525–1572

Halachist. Rama served as rabbi in Krakow, Poland, and is considered the definitive authority on Jewish law among Ashkenazic Jewry. Rama authored glosses (known as the *Mapah*) on the Shulchan Aruch, and *Darchoi Moshe*, a commentary on the halachic compendium *Arbaah Turim*.

The final day of the festival is called "Simchat Torah," inasmuch as we celebrate and make a festive meal to mark the completion of the Torah. It is customary that the person who merits to conclude the Torah as well as the person who merits to read the first portion of Bereishit donate and call upon others to make a festive meal.

It is also customary in these parts to take all the Torahs out in the evening and the morning and to sing songs—each place according to its custom.

Another custom is to surround the *bimah* with the Torah scrolls from the synagogue, as we do with the *lulav* [on Sukkot]. All of this is done to increase joy.

## TEXT 2

RABBI YISRAEL MEIR HAKOHEN KAGAN, MISHNAH BERURAH, AD LOC.

כתב מהרי"ק בשם רב האי גאון בשורש ט': "יום זה רגילים  
אצלנו לרקד בו, אפילו כמה זקנים, בשעה שאומרים קילוסים  
לתורה וכו'".

ולכן יש להתאמץ בזה לרקד ולזמר לכבוד התורה, כמו שכתוב גבי  
דוד המלך ע"ה: "מפזז ומכרכר בכל עוז לפני ה'", וכן כתבו משם  
האר"י ז"ל.

והעידו על האר"י ז"ל, שאמר שהמעלה העליונה שהשיג – באה  
לו על ידי שהיה משמח בכל עוז בשמחה של מצוה, וגם על  
הגר"א ז"ל כתבו שהיה מרקד לפני הספר תורה בכל כוחו.

It is cited in the name of Rabbi Hai Gaon, "We are accustomed to dancing on this day. Even the elderly participate in the festivities, praising the Torah."

Thus, one ought to invest energy and dance and sing to the honor of the Torah, as it is stated regarding King David, ". . . hopping and dancing before G-d." The Arizal is cited similarly.

It has been testified about the Arizal that he said that he merited his lofty heights credit to the great joy he exhibited for the joy of a mitzvah. It is said about the great Gaon of Vilna that he, too, would dance with all his might in front of the Torah.

**Rabbi Yisrael Meir  
Hakohen Kagan  
(Chafetz Chayim)  
1839–1933**

Pre-WWII Polish halachist and ethicist. Rabbi Kagan was the dean of the illustrious yeshiva in Radin, Poland. A prolific author on topics of halachah and ethical behavior, he is often called *Chafetz Chayim* after his first work, a comprehensive digest of laws pertaining to ethical speech. His magnum opus, on which he worked for 28 years, is *Mishnah Berurah*, a concise commentary on the first section of the Shulchan Aruch. He also authored *Bi'ur Halachah* on the Shulchan Aruch and numerous other works.

## Different Ancient Practices

### TEXT 3

MAIMONIDES, MISHNEH TORAH, LAWS OF PRAYER  
AND THE PRIESTLY BLESSING 13:1

המנהג הפשוט בכל ישראל שמשלימין את התורה בשנה אחת, מתחילין בשבת שאחר חג הסוכות, וקורין בסדר בראשית . . . וקוראין והולכין על הסדר הזה, עד שגומרין את התורה בחג הסוכות. ויש מי שמשלים את התורה בשלוש שנים ואינו מנהג פשוט.

The common custom throughout all Israel is to finish reading the Torah in one year. [The cycle] begins on the Shabbat after the Sukkot festival, reading the *sidrah*, Bereishit. . . . We continue reading according to this order until the Torah is completed, during the Sukkot festival.

There are those who finish the Torah reading in a three-year cycle. However, this is not a widely accepted custom.

**Rabbi Moshe  
ben Maimon  
(Maimonides, Rambam)  
1135–1204**

Halachist, philosopher, author, and physician. Maimonides was born in Córdoba, Spain. After the conquest of Córdoba by the Almohads, he fled Spain and eventually settled in Cairo, Egypt. There, he became the leader of the Jewish community and served as court physician to the vizier of Egypt. He is most noted for authoring the *Mishneh Torah*, an encyclopedic arrangement of Jewish law; and for his philosophical work, *Guide for the Perplexed*. His rulings on Jewish law are integral to the formation of halachic consensus.

## New Cycle, New Beginning

# TEXT 4

OTZAR HAGE'ONIM, TRACTATE MEGILAH, P. 62

יש מנהג כי ביום הכפורים בעת מנחה אומר מן "בראשית" עד "יום אחד" על פה. ומביאים ראיה, כי כל עשרת ימי תשובה השטן עומד להשטין את ישראל, ואומר: הרי התורה שנתת לישראל כבר גמרו אותה! וכאשר הקדוש ברוך הוא שומע שהתחילו מבראשית, מיד גוער בשטן ואומר לו: הלא ראית, כי מיד שגמרו – התחילו מרוב אהבתם את תורת! מיד ידום השטן בעל כרחו וכו'.

There is a custom to recite the verses from “*Bereishit . . .*” until “. . . day one” during *minchah* of Yom Kippur. They cite support for this custom from the fact that the entire Ten Days of Penitence, the Satan seeks to prosecute the Jews, arguing, “Look!—the Jews are finished with the Torah that you gave them!” When G-d hears the Jews starting anew from Bereishit, He immediately chastises the Satan and exclaims, “Don’t you see—the Jews have immediately restarted the Torah, for they love it so much!”

Immediately, the Satan is forcibly silenced.



## What Happened to Shavuot?

### TEXT 5

RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL OF LUBAVITCH, OR HATORAH, DEVARIM 4, P. 1779

להבין ענין שמחת תורה, מהו השייכות לשמוח שמחת תורה  
ביום השמיני עצרת, והלא בשבועות הוא זמן מתן תורתנו? ואם  
כן, אז היה צריך להיות קביעת שמחה זו, דהאי יומא דקא גרים!

Why do we rejoice in the Torah on the eighth day of Sukkot if the Torah was given on Shavuot? Wouldn't it make more sense to celebrate Simchat Torah on the day the Torah was given?

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch**  
**(Tzemach Tzedek)**  
**1789–1866**

Chasidic rebbe and noted author. The *Tzemach Tzedek* was the third leader of the Chabad Chasidic movement and a noted authority on Jewish law. His numerous works include halachic responsa, Chasidic discourses, and kabbalistic writings. Active in the communal affairs of Russian Jewry, he worked to alleviate the plight of the cantonists, Jewish children kidnapped to serve in the Czar's army. He passed away in Lubavitch, leaving 7 sons and 2 daughters.

## Celebrating the Second Tablets

### TEXT 6

RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL OF LUBAVITCH, IBID.

אך הענין, כי בשבועות ניתנו לוחות ראשונות, אבל לוחות האחרונות ניתנו ביום כיפור, כידוע. ועל לוחות אלו הוא שנוהגים לעשות חדוה ושמחה בשמיני עצרת . . .

והענין, כי לוחות ראשונות הם כנגד בחינת צדיקים . . . ולוחות האחרונות הם כנגד בחינת בעלי תשובה . . . ולכך גם כן ניתנו לוחות האחרונות ביום הכיפורים, מפני שאז הוא עת רצון, יום מחילה וסליחה כו', והיינו על ידי בחינת תשובה בכל עשרה ימים שלפניו . . .

ועל זה הוא שנקבע להיות שמחת תורה, כי עיקר בחינת שמחה הוא דוקא מקירוב הבא אחר הריחוק. על דרך משל, בן מלך כשהיה בשביה ונתרחק מאוד מאביו המלך, אזי אחר כך בצאתו חפשי, בבואו אל אור פני אביו המלך – אזי דוקא תתגדל השמחה מאוד, וישמחו שניהם שמחה רבה ועצומה מקירובם זה, הבא אחר הריחוק שנתרחקו כו'. מה שאין כן כשהיה אצל המלך – תענוג תמידי אינו תענוג.

וכך הוא ההפרש בין בחינת צדיקים לבעלי תשובה, שמתן תורה שבשבועות שהוא כנגד בחינת צדיקים, אבל מתן תורה שביום הכפורים שהוא כנגד בחינת בעל תשובה – שנתרחקו מאוד פני מלך חיים תחילה, ולכן כשנתקרבו אחר כך ביום הכיפורים, על ידי התשובה מעומקא דליבא שבחילא יתיר ממטה למעלה, ועל ידי זה "קראתיך הוי" מלמעלה למטה ומתייחדים פנים בפנים, אזי תגדל השמחה והחדוה עד מאוד בשניהם.

Shavuot is the day the First Tablets were given, whereas the Second Tablets were given on Yom Kippur. It is these Second Tablets that are celebrated at the end of Sukkot. . . .

The First Tablets represent the status of *tzadikim* . . . while the Second Tablets represent the status of the *baal teshuvah*, . . . which is why they were given on Yom Kippur, the day of forgiveness. . . .

And this is what Simchat Torah is all about, because true joy is when one is reunited with something he was previously distant from, as illustrated by the following parable: A prince was once held captive, far from his father the king. When he was finally released and reunited with his father, *that* is when they experienced true happiness and rejoiced together in the most profound way. Their joy was not the same when the prince had been together with the king as usual, for “constant pleasure is not pleasure.”

This is the difference between the mode of the *tzadik*, represented by the Torah as given on Shavuot, and the mode of the *baal teshuvah*, represented by the Second Tablets received on Yom Kippur, after they had become distant from G-d. When the Jewish people put in that tremendous effort, from the depths of their hearts, to return to G-d on Yom Kippur, G-d reciprocated, and they were reunited face-to-face. This was a cause of tremendous joy and gladness for [G-d and for the Jewish people].

## II. A DIFFERENT KIND OF PRODUCE

*Be Only Happy*

### TEXT 7

DEVARIM (DEUTERONOMY) 16:15

שְׁבַעַת יָמִים תַּחֲגֹג לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה', כִּי יְבָרְכֶךָ ה'  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל תְּבוּאָתְךָ וּבְכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ, וְהָיִיתָ אֶף שְׂמֵחַ:

Seven days you shall celebrate the festival to the L-rd, your G-d, in the place which G-d shall choose, because the L-rd, your G-d, will bless you in all your produce, and in all the work of your hands, and you will only be happy.

## Marking the Agricultural Cycle

### TEXT 8

MIDRASH, YALKUT SHIMONI, EMOR 654

אתה מוצא שלש שמחות כתיב בחג: "ושמחת בחגך"; "והיית אך שמח"; "ושמחתם לפני ה' אלהיכם שבעת ימים". אבל בפסח אין אתה מוצא שכתוב בו אפילו שמחה אחת, למה? אתה מוצא שבפסח התבואה נידונית, ואין אדם יודע אם עושה השנה אם אינו עושה . . .

כן אתה מוצא שאין כתוב בעצרת אלא שמחה אחת, דכתיב: "ועשית חג שבועות לה' אלוֹקֵיךָ, ושמחת אתה וביתך". ולמה כתב בה שמחה אחת? שהתבואה נכנסת בפנים. ומה טעם אין כתוב שם שתי שמחות? לפי שפירות האילן נידונין . . . אבל בחג . . . שהתבואה ופירות האילן בפנים, לפיכך כתב שלוש שמחות.

#### Yalkut Shimoni

A Midrash that covers the entire biblical text. Its material is collected from all over rabbinic literature, including the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds and various ancient Midrashic texts. It contains several passages from *Midrashim* that have been lost, as well as different versions of existing *Midrashim*. It is unclear when and by whom this Midrash was redacted.

Joy is mentioned three times in the Torah regarding the Festival of Sukkot:

1. "And you shall rejoice in your festival."
2. "And you will only be happy."
3. "And you shall rejoice before the L-rd, your G-d, for a seven-day period."

Yet when it comes to Passover, joy is not mentioned even once. Why?

The answer is that the judgment for grain takes place on Passover, so one is unsure if there will be enough grain this year or not. [Therefore, there is no specific command to be joyful on Passover]. . . .

Now, joy *is* mentioned with regard to the holiday of Shavuot, but only once, “And you shall perform the Festival of Weeks to the L-rd, your G-d, . . . and you and your family shall rejoice. . . .” Why is joy mentioned once? Because Shavuot is the time for gathering the grain [but the joy is incomplete because] the tree-fruits are [still being] judged. . . .

But regarding Sukkot . . . when the grain and the fruits are already in the house, joy is mentioned three times.

## Spiritual Farming

# TEXT 9

RABBI SHMUEL SCHNEERSOHN, TORAT SHMUEL 5630, P. 132

השלוש מועדים נקבעו דוקא על זמן שנגמרת התבואה... ולכאורה אינו מובן, למה הוקבעו דוקא באותו זמן שהתבואה נגמרת כו', ומה שייכות מועדים לתבואה?

אך הענין הוא, דהנה כמו שיש תבואה וזריעה וקצירה בגשמיות – כמו כן יש גם כן תבואה ברוחניות, ומה שהכתוב מקפיד דוקא על זמן התבואה, המכוון היא על תבואה רוחנית. אף על פי שאין המקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו, אף על פי כן עיקר הכוונה קאי על תבואה רוחנית. והראיה משמיטה, רק שהקפידה גם כן על תבואה גשמית וכו'.

**Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn (Rebbe Maharash) 1834–1882**

Known by the acronym "Maharash"; fourth Chabad rebbe and leader of Russian Jewry. Born in Lubavitch, Russia, he was the youngest son of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (the *Tzemach Tzedek*). Much of his leadership was devoted to combating anti-Jewish policies. His discourses have been collected and published as *Likutei Torah: Torat Shmuel*.

The timings of the three festivals were fixed specifically to mark milestones in the crop cycle. . . . But when thinking about it, why should that be the case? What do the festivals have to do with crops?

The answer is as follows:

Just as there are physical crops and planting and harvesting, so, too, there are spiritual crops. The Torah's association of the holidays with crops is about the *spiritual* crops. True, the literal meaning of the verses stand, and the physical crops are relevant to the holidays, but the main point is the spiritual crop. Proof of this is the *shemita* year [when there is no harvest at all, yet the holidays are celebrated just the same].

*Torah Is Bread***TEXT 10**

TALMUD TRACTATE CHAGIGAH, 14A

”כל משען לחם” אלו בעלי תלמוד, שנאמר: ”לכו לחמו בלחמי  
 ושתנו ביין מסכתי” (לחם אלו בעלי תלמוד. שיש לסמוך על  
 הוראתן כסמיכת לחם – רש”י).

When the verse states, “Every support of bread,” it refers to the masters of Talmud (who can be relied upon as one relies upon bread—Rashi).

**Babylonian Talmud**

A literary work of monumental proportions that draws upon the legal, spiritual, intellectual, ethical, and historical traditions of Judaism. The 37 tractates of the Babylonian Talmud contain the teachings of the Jewish sages from the period after the destruction of the 2nd Temple through the 5th century CE. It has served as the primary vehicle for the transmission of the Oral Law and the education of Jews over the centuries; it is the entry point for all subsequent legal, ethical, and theological Jewish scholarship.



## Mitzvot Are Fruit

# TEXT 11

TALMUD TRACTATE SOTAH, 46A

אמר רבי יוחנן בן שאול: מפני מה אמרה תורה הביא עגלה בנחל?  
 אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: יבוא דבר שלא עשה פירות, ויערף במקום  
 שאין עושה פירות, וככפר על מי שלא הניחו לעשות פירות.  
 מאי פירות? אילימא פריה ורביה, אלא מעתה אזקן ואסריס הכי  
 נמי דלא ערפינן? – אלא מצות.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Shaul said, “Why does the Torah say to bring a heifer whose neck is broken to a stream?”

“The Holy One, blessed be He, said, ‘Let something that did not produce fruit come and have its neck broken at a place that does not produce fruit, and atone for the murder of one who was not given an opportunity to produce fruit.’

“Now, what fruit is this [that he was not given an opportunity to produce]? If we say it refers to fruit of the womb, will you say that this law doesn’t apply in the case of an elderly person or an infertile person [who could not have had any more children even had they lived]? Rather, the fruit referred to are *mitzvot*.”

## The Cycle of Spiritual Agriculture

# TEXT 12

THE REBBE, RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL  
SCHNEERSON, LIKUTEI SICHOT 29, P. 233

די דריי זמנים פון "חודש האביב", "חג הקציר" און "חג האסיף" – זיינען דריי שלבים אין דער צמיחה פון דער "תבואה" רוחנית בחיי עם ישראל [נאר דערנאך ווען בני ישראל זיינען על אדמתם, ווערט עס "נשתלשל" אויך בגשמיות, אז עס שטעלט זיך ביי זיי אויס די שמחה אויך בשייכות צו תבואה גשמית].

These three seasons—the “month of spring,” the “Festival of the Harvest,” and the “Festival of the Gathering”—represent three stages in the growth of spiritual produce in our lives. [It is just that when the Jewish people live in their land, this concept also occurs on the physical plane, and the physical produce is celebrated as well.]

### Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson 1902–1994

The towering Jewish leader of the 20th century, known as “the Lubavitcher Rebbe,” or simply as “the Rebbe.” Born in southern Ukraine, the Rebbe escaped Nazi-occupied Europe, arriving in the U.S. in June 1941. The Rebbe inspired and guided the revival of traditional Judaism after the European devastation, impacting virtually every Jewish community the world over. The Rebbe often emphasized that the performance of just one additional good deed could usher in the era of Mashiach. The Rebbe’s scholarly talks and writings have been printed in more than 200 volumes.

## Faith, Information, Action!

# TEXT 13

THE REBBE, RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON, IBID., P. 234

און דאס איז דער אויפטו פון חג הסוכות: בשעת עס גייט דורך דער זמן (און די עבודת ה' שבו) צווישן שבועות און סוכות, און במשך פון דעם זמן, און בא די פארשידענע אומשטענדן וואס מאכן זיך בחיי יום יום, פירן זיך אידן על פי תורה ומצותיה – האט זיך דערמיט אויסגעפירט דער ענין פון "באספך את מעשיך מן השדה" – מ'האט אויפגעזאמלט די תבואה (רוחנית) אין דעם אייגענעם רשות – מ'איז פארזיכערט מיט דער עבודת התורה ומצות (תבואה רוחנית) אויך במעשה.

און דערמיט איז מובן, וואס דער גודל השמחה פון חג הסוכות איז פארבונדן מיט "מאסך" זיין די "תבואה" רוחנית.

This is what Sukkot is all about: When the time (and our religious service) between Shavuot and Sukkot passes, and we act according to the Torah and its *mitzvot* under all the various circumstances we encounter every day, we have thus "gathered our work from the field." We have gathered the (spiritual) produce into our personal domain; our divine service (spiritual produce) is thus realized in practical application.

This explains why the great joy of Sukkot is about "gathering" the spiritual "produce."

### III. THE BATTLE-TESTED SOLDIER

*Been There, Done That*

## TEXT 14

MAIMONIDES, MISHNEH TORAH, LAWS OF REPENTANCE 7:4

ואל ידמה אדם בעל תשובה, שהוא מרוחק ממעלת הצדיקים מפני העונות והחטאות שעשה. אין הדבר כן, אלא אהוב ונחמד הוא לפני הבורא כאילו לא חטא מעולם! ולא עוד אלא ששכרו הרבה, שהרי טעם טעם החטא ופירש ממנו וכבש יצרו. אמרו חכמים: "מקום שבעלי תשובה עומדין, אין צדיקים גמורין יכולין לעמוד בו", כלומר, מעלתן גדולה ממעלת אלו שלא חטאו מעולם, מפני שהן כובשים יצרם יותר מהם.

A *baal teshuvah* should not consider himself distant from the level of the righteous because of the sins and transgressions that he committed. This is not true. He is beloved and desirable before the Creator as if he never sinned.

Furthermore, he has a great reward, for he has tasted sin and yet separated himself from it, conquering his [evil] inclination. Our sages declared, "In the place where *baalei teshuvah* stand, even the completely righteous are not able to stand." The level of *baalei teshuvah* transcends the level of those who never sinned at all, for they overcome their [evil] inclination more.

## The Unbreakable Baal Teshuvah

# TEXT 15a

THE REBBE, RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL  
SCHNEERSON, LIKUTEI SICHOT 29, P. 235

ביי אזא וואס לא "טעם טעם חטא" קען מען ניט זיין זיכער  
בוודאות גמורה אז זיין דרגת הצדקות וועט אנהאלטן שטענדיק  
אין אלע מצבים. עס קען זיין, אז די גאנצקייט פון זיין צדקות איז  
דערפאר וואס ער איז ניט אויסגעפרוואוט געווארן מיט אנדערע  
אדער מיט גרעסערע נסיונות. אבער אילו יצויר אז מאיזו סיבה  
שתהיה וועט ער שטיין אין אן אנדער מצב, וואו עס זיינען דא  
נסיונות צו וועלכע ער איז ניט צוגעוואוינט – צי וועט ער אויך  
יענע נסיונות קענען ביישטיין? – דאס קען מען ניט וויסן.

דוקא א בעל תשובה, וואס "טעם טעם חטא ופירש ממנו",  
וויבאלד אז ער איז שוין דורכגעגאנגען דעם היפך כו' און דאך  
"פירש ממנו וכבש יצרו", גיט דאס די פארזיכערונג אז ער  
וועט בלייבן בצדקתו – און אין דעם באשטייט די מעלה פון א  
בעל תשובה.

When one hasn't "tasted sin," we cannot be certain that his level of piety would withstand every test. Perhaps the reason he is so pious is because he's never been tested with other kinds of or with greater tests; if for some reason he was exposed to a different set of circumstances, with challenges he was unaccustomed to, would he be able to withstand them? We cannot know.

On the other hand, we can be certain that the *baal teshuvah*, who has "tasted sin and separated himself from it," will remain righteous, because he has already been there, yet has "separated from it and overcome his evil inclination." This is the unique quality the *baal teshuvah* possesses.

*The Confluence of Sukkot and  
Simchat Torah—Teshuvah*

**TEXT 15b**

THE REBBE, RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON, IBID.

דאס וואס תורה איז אן ענין פון "מורשה" ביי אידן, ווייזט . . . אז  
אידן בלייבן צוגעבונדן צו תורה אין אלעערליי אומשטענדן . . .  
און דער ענין הירושה שבתורה ווערט ארויסגעבראכט בגלוי  
אין עבודת התשובה, וואס ווייזט ווי תורה ווערט פארבונדן מיט  
דער עצם מציאות פון א אידן, ביז אז מ'קען ניט נפרד ווערן פון  
תורה, און אפילו ווען מ'האט זיך אפגעריסן רחמנא ליצלן פון  
אויבערשטן איז עס נאר לפי שעה, סוף סוף איז ער זיכער חוזר  
צו זיין אמת'ער מציאות – עבודת ה'.  
און דערפאר איז דער ענין . . . פארבונדן דוקא מיט שמחת תורה,  
וואס איז נקבע געווארן אויף נתינת לוחות שניות וועלכע זיינען  
געגעבן געווארן דורך דער תשובה פון אידן.

Torah is the "heritage" of the Jewish people. This means . . .  
a Jew remains bound to the Torah under any circumstanc-  
es. . . .

This is demonstrated distinctly by the concept of repen-  
tance. Repentance shows how a Jew is bound to the Torah  
at his very core, to the point he cannot be separated from  
it. Even if, G-d forbid, one is separated from G-d, it is only  
temporary; in the end, he will undoubtedly return to the  
true reality—serving G-d.

This is why [the "heritage" factor of Torah] . . . is noted on  
Simchat Torah, which marks the giving of the Second Tab-  
lets, given as a result of the repentance of the Jewish people.