

SIMCHA - REJOICING

Simchat Torah is not just about **rejoicing for the Torah**, it is about rejoicing and celebrating **our personal connection to and involvement with the Torah!** **Precisely now, in our present situation, we need to strengthen our happiness, not suspend it!** We must add joy to uplift our spirits, and empower people. The lockdowns and social distancing are very difficult, and they do the opposite of making most people feel happy. Canceling the customs of Simchat Torah now may make the depressing situation even worse, and this is not what we want to achieve.

Therefore, it is all the more so incumbent upon us to increase and fortify ourselves with joy, to find ways to celebrate all of our customs and to rejoice in the festival in a way that is appropriate for Corona times (and B'Ezrat Hashem when this is all over we will celebrate as normal).

HAKAFOT

The Rama (669) wrote that they would encircle the bimah with the Sifrei Torah “all for the sake of happiness”. Although ordinarily we are strict to carry out this custom in regular years, and it is of very important significance, nonetheless it is not required by law and the Rishonim did not do it. Therefore, one should do the following:

- a) If appropriate distances can be kept, one can do the Hakafot (members of the same family may stick together - the distance is between one family to the next). However, they should only do short Hakafot, so as not to run into problems. The person holding the Torah should wear gloves, or at least disinfect his hands with alco-gel before and after. Do not pass the Torahs around during the Hakafot. In between each Hakafah, disinfect hands with alco-gel, put on gloves and then pass the Torahs out to people.
- b) One can put the Sifrei Torah on the bimah and do Hakafot without touching the Sifrei Torah at all. It goes without saying that this is done without holding hands and while keeping the required distance. If there are no Sifrei Torah, one can put a Tanach or another Torah book on the bimah instead.
- c) You can request that each person bring the Torah book that they are currently learning - for example, those who are learning Daf Yomi can bring Masechet Eiruvin – and everyone can dance with their personal sefer instead of the Sifrei Torah, which are placed on the bimah. I learned of this idea from Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin, where Rav Meir Shapiro had the custom to do the Hakafot not only with the Sifrei Torah, but also with all of the books of the Talmud in the Yeshiva.
- d) You can have every family dance in their own area (with their own Torah books etc.), instead of normal Hakafot. Everyone can dance this way for a few minutes for each Hakafah, and then move on to the next one.
- e) If there is concern that people will not follow the health guidelines, Hakafot should not be done at all, and you should rejoice in the Torah without them.

In light of all of these instructions, Hakafot will not be lengthy in any case. If there are additional complications, such as the weather etc., one may push off the Hakafot until Mincha or another time.

KERI'AT HATORAH – TORAH READING

The Torah Reading

If there are 3 Sifrei Torah: One reads as normal, the same as every year. Since Simchat Torah falls on Shabbat this year, the custom is to have six Aliyot until "מעונה" (the Cohen's Aliyah is split in two: Cohen – until "מדברותיך"; Levi – from "תורה צוה לנו משה" until "ועזר מצריו תהיה"); and "מעונה" is the seventh Aliyah until "על במותינו תדרך" (there are also other customs). This seventh Aliyah can also be the Aliyah of Kol HaNe'arim. For Chatan Torah one goes back and reads again from "מעונה".

If there are only 2 Sifrei Torah: The Halachic authorities disagree in this case if for the third reading it is better to: go back to the first sefer - VeZot HaBracha (Rama 669; Aruch HaShulchan ibid 1); or to read from the second Sefer – Bereishit (Biur Halacha ibid, and this is how he understood the Rama). In practice, in order not to overburden the congregation, it is preferable in our case to go back to the first Sefer – since it is closer to the Maftir which is in Parshat Pinchas.

If there is only 1 Sefer Torah: One reads as normal, the same as when there are 3 sefarim, except that they roll the Torah in between each reading.

Hagbah when reading from the same sefer again:

Do we do Hagbah in between each sefer when there is only one or two sefarim? It depends on the custom and the reason for it. Those who do **Hagbah before the reading** - this is the custom of the Sepharadim - **wish to show the reading to the public**, and thus one would do this before each sefer. Those who do **Hagbah after Keriat HaTorah** are doing so **for the Honor of the Torah** and thus it would seem that there is **no need to do this twice with the same sefer**. Practically speaking, this matter does not have a final ruling. It certainly seems appropriate to do Hagbah in between each sefer on Simchat Torah, for even according to the Ashkenazic custom this is a sort of 'farewell' from the current reading. However, since the matter is not clear, one may do as he pleases - especially in our Corona reality, where the one assisting the person doing Hagbah has to be from his own family. Thus, sometimes it is simply easier to skip all additional Hagbahs; in which case he would only do Hagbah at the end of all three Torah readings.

ALIYOT LATORAH – CALLING EVERYONE UP TO THE TORAH

Receiving an Aliyah to the Torah

The **Rama** writes (669) that the custom on Simchat Torah is "to call up as many people as possible before the Sefer Torah". When there is a small minyan, there is no problem in continuing this custom, and calling everyone up to the Torah. However, when this is not possible, such as in our current reality where we cannot have a lengthy davening – especially when it is outdoors, one can do the following:

1. It is enough to have the seven aliyot (and maftir) and no more.
2. **A special suggestion for this year:** You can split up into groups (keeping a safe distance for Corona), with one person in each group standing next to the Sefer Torah so that he can see the writing, and when he makes the bracha everyone listens and says Amen - thus fulfilling their obligation through him. The same should be done for the bracha following the aliyah.

Therefore: For the Cohen's Aliyah – one Cohen should make the bracha and all of the other Cohanim should stand by him - at a safe distance of at least 2 meters (even though they cannot see the writing) - and answer Amen. The same procedure should be followed with the Levi'im and every other Aliyah of Yisrael. In this way, every person will have an Aliyah, but it will not take a long time.

The source for this idea: The **Magen Avraham** (669) writes that the custom on Simchat Torah was to call up several people at once (although he found this difficult, because when two people are making the bracha at the same time you cannot hear them well). The **Mishna Berura** (s.k. 12) cites this custom and writes (in light of the Pri Megadim) that it is better for one person to make the bracha for everyone - everyone should listen with the intent of being called up with him and answer Amen. According to this custom, there is an additional benefit: since those who are answering Amen are considered as one who has been called up to the Torah (if we rely on the lenient opinions who say that the person being called up does not have to see the writing). Also, there is no concern here that it is a bracha levatala/blessing in vain (I wrote about this at length in my responsa on Outdoor Minyanim).

In the **Sha'ar HaTzion** (s.k. 11) he writes that it is best if the first 5 aliyot (and in our case 7 because it is Shabbat) are called up one by one, as is done on every Yom Tov and Shabbat. But it seems to me that this is not necessary, and in Corona times we can be lenient in this as well.

CHATAN TORAH & CHATAN BEREISHIT

Saying the "Reshut" (the special call up) for the Chatanim

According to the Ashkenazic custom one can shorten it as follows:

Reshut Chatan Torah:

מרשות האל הגדול הגיבור והנורא, ומרשות מפי ומפנינים יקרה, אפתח פי בשיר ובזמרה להודות ולהלל לדר בנהורא, שהחיינו וקיימנו ביראתו הטהורה, והגיענו לשמחה בשמחת התורה. ובכן יהי רצון מלפני הגבורה, לתת חן וחסד וחיים ונזר ועטרה לרבי (פלוני בן פלוני) הנבחר להשלים התורה, לאמצו, לברכו, לגדלו בתלמוד תורה, לקרבו, לרחמו, לשומרו מכל צוקה וצרה. ובשכר זה יזכה מאל נורא, לראות בניו ובני בניו עוסקים בתורה ומקיימי מצוות בתוך עם יפה וברה, ויזכה לשמחה בשמחת בית הבחירה. יעמוד רבי (פלוני בן פלוני) חתן התורה.

Reshut Chatan Bereishit:

מרשות מרומם על כל ברכה ושירה, נורא על כל תהילה וזמרה. ובכן נסמכתי דעת כולם לבררה, בחור הרימותי מעם תוך החבורה, צדק וחסד רודף באורח ישרה, ועתה קום רבי (פלוני ב"ר פלוני) עמוד להתאזרה, בא והתייצב לימיני וקרא, מעשה בראשית לכבודו צור ברא, מהר עמוד עמוד רבי (פלוני בן פלוני) חתן בראשית ברא, מרשות הקהל הקדוש הזה וברך אל גדול ונורא, אמן יענו אחריו הכל מהרה, יעמוד (פלוני בן פלוני) חתן בראשית.

According to the Sepharadi custom one can shorten it as follows:

- A shortened version of the lengthy "יהי רצון" when taking the Torah out.
- A shortened version of the tefilla "לגומרה של תורה".
- A symbolic short song for the pizmonim that are sung for the aliyot of the Chatan MeOnah, Chatan Torah and Chatan Bereishit.
- Leaving out the songs for each person being called up (as is the custom in some of the communities for the last round).
- Go faster when saying the "תיקון גשם".

ADDITIONAL LAWS AND ISSUES THAT ARISE ON SIMCHAT TORAH DUE TO CORONA

Mi Shebeirach:

One should not lengthen these, and should shorten them as follows:

- One can simply say: "מי שברך האבות הוא יברך את הבנים ונאמר אמן"
- Alternately, if you decide to take the suggestion where several people are being called up at once, you can make one mi shebeirach and add everyone's names into it: "מי שברך... הוא יברך את פלוני ב"ר פלוני ואת כל משפחתו, ואת פלוני ב"ר פלוני ואת כל משפחתו..."

The Aliyot of Kol HaNe'arim, Chatan Torah and Chatan Bereishit:

This year we will not be spreading a Tallit over the children nor over the Chatan Torah/ Bereishit. The traditional bags of treats which are handed out to the children can still be distributed as usual, while following all the rules of Corona and using only products which are individually wrapped.

Alco-gel

This year we must use Alco-gel constantly, but we must be careful that it does not drip on the Sefer Torah (do not bring it near it), and use caution since it is flammable.

One Who Is Davening Alone At Home:

He should say "Yizkor" by himself, and add "משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם" in Musaf - after he is certain that the congregation has already said it.

He does not do Hakafot, but he can certainly say/sing the verses and Piyutim that are usually said during the Hakafot (for both the evening and the morning). It is a good idea that he, and all the members of his family, dance with a Gemara or Tanach, as we mentioned above regarding the congregation.