# REJOICING IN TORAH; DANCING WITH GOD

## *HAKKAFOT* AND DANCE ON SIMCHAT TORAH THROUGHOUT THE AGES

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## Abstract

This thesis, *Rejoicing in Torah; Dancing with God: Hakkafot and Dance on Simchat Torah throughout the Ages*, traces the role and significance of *hakkafot* and dance on Simchat Torah through several periods of Jewish history. The first chapter traces the development of Simchat Torah as a holiday with its own name and distinct practices. Chapter two follows the history of *hakkafot* and dance on Simchat Torah, starting with the *hakkafot* around the Temple altar on Sukkot and continuing through the Geonic and Rishonic periods until the codification of *hakkafot* in the Shulchan Aruch. Chapter three closely examines the meaning of *hakkafot* and dance in the Zohar, Lurianic kabbalah, and Chasidism. Chapter four discusses the Reform movement's treatment of *hakkafot* and dance, from early German Reform through the Reform movement in the United States today.

In my research, I made use of a wide range of primary sources including Mishnah, Babylonian Talmud, Shulchan Aruch, Zohar, and Reform prayerbooks. Chapter four incorporates field research personally undertaken at the annual conference of NAORRR (National Association of Retired Rabbis). For secondary sources, I relied heavily upon Avraham Yaari's work, *Toldot Chag Simchat-Torah: Hishtalsh'lut Minhagav ba-T'futzot Yisrael L'doroteihen.* I also made extensive use of background material on Lurianic kabbalah as well as Reform Jewish history.

The main contribution of this thesis is its focused study of the development of *hakkafot* and dance on the festival of Simchat Torah. This thesis adds a new layer to already extant research by incorporating material from the Reform movement. Not only does the thesis examine the historical development of these practices, but it also

highlights how the role and meaning of the practices have changed, depending on the worldviews of particular Jewish communities in particular times and places.

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# Contents

## Abbreviations

BT= Babylonian Talmud

JPS= Jewish Publication Society Tanach (see Bibliography)

M= Mishnah

EJ= *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CD Rom version (see Bibliography)

UPB= *Union Prayer Book* (see Bibliography)

# Introduction

*אמר רבי אלעזר: עתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא לעשות מחול לצדיקים והוא יושב ביניהם בגן עדן, וכל אחד ואחד מראה בעצבעו, שנאמר: ואמר ביום ההוא הנה אלהינו זה קויינו לו ויושיענו זה ה' קויינו לו נגילה ונשמחה בישועתו (ישעיה כה,ט). --בבלי תענית לא,א*

*Rabbi Eleazar said: The Holy Blessed One will lead a dance of the righteous in the Garden of Eden with God at the center, so that each of them may point his or her finger and say, as it is written, "This is our God, for whom we waited, that He might save us; this is the Eternal, in whom we trusted. Let us be glad and rejoice in God's salvation (Isaiah 25:9)." --Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 31a.*

The above *aggadah* sets a scene in the "world to come" in which God will lead the righteous in a circular dance around Godself. While this midrashic scene depicts an ideal moment of redemption in the future to come, Jews experience that dance with and around God every year, in *this* world, through ritual. On the festival of Simchat Torah, Jews initiate their own circular processions, or *hakkafot*, as they celebrate the completion and the resumption of the Torah-reading cycle. Jewish communities gather on this day to move around and with the Torah scroll, in circles. Some communities circle in solemn procession while others break out into raucous, spontaneous whirling. The Torah scroll travels with the community during the processions, and often, community members hold the scroll in the center of a circle of dancing congregants. We might argue that Jews physically symbolize their relationship with God and Torah through *hakkafot* and dance. God stands at the center and dances with the people as they dance with and around the Torah scroll.

The practices of *hakkafot* and dance on Simchat Torah have a complex history and have acquired a wide range of meanings over the centuries and in various Jewish communities. In the following chapters, we will trace the origins and the development of these Simchat Torah rituals -- rituals which artfully weave together the three basic

elements of Jewish existence: God, Torah and Israel.

# Chapter One

## The Origins of Simchat Torah

### Introduction

The holiday of Simchat Torah (literally, "rejoicing in the Torah") culminates the Jewish New Year's season of reflection, repentance and celebration. Simchat Torah falls on the final day of the Sukkot festival which begins on the 15th of Tishrei and lasts for eight days in Israel and nine days in the Diaspora. The first and last days are considered holidays, with all of the restrictions that accompany a holiday in Jewish tradition. In the Diaspora, these holidays are celebrated for two days each. The intervening days of Sukkot are called *Chol Hamoed* and do not carry the same restrictions as the first and last days. The seventh day of Sukkot (21st of Tishrei) is called Hoshana Rabbah and the eighth day is Shemini Atzeret (22nd of Tishrei). In diaspora communities which celebrate two days of a holiday, Simchat Torah falls on the 23rd of Tishrei, the second day of Shemini Atzeret. In Israel, the holiday falls on the 22nd of Tishrei, the same day as Shemini Atzeret. For the most part, Reform congregations in the United States do not observe the second day of holidays and therefore celebrate Simchat Torah on Shemini Atzeret, the eighth day of Sukkot.[1]

Today, Simchat Torah is characterized by a whole host of practices. Primarily, Simchat Torah marks the day when Jews complete the cycle of Torah reading for the year and then begin the cycle again. In the synagogue on Simchat Torah day, the last portion of Deuteronomy and the first portion of Genesis are read from the Torah, marking the end

1. EJ "Simhat Torah."

and the beginning of the cycle. In some communities, the last portion of Deuteronomy is also read the night before.[2]

The *haftarah* comes from the Book of Joshua, chapter one, verses one through 18, beginning with the words, "After the death of Moses. . .the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' attendant: Prepare to cross the Jordan, together with all this people, into the land that I am giving to the Israelites."[3] The verses that follow describe how Joshua orders the people to cross the Jordan and how people respond that they will obey him as they obeyed Moses before him. This selection from Joshua is not the original *haftarah* for this day and comes about in the geonic period. The original *haftarah* comes from I Kings and describes Solomon's dedication of the ark in the Temple. We will further explain this issue of the change in *haftarot* below.

Upon taking the Torah scrolls out of the ark on Simchat Torah, participants[4] make seven *hakkafot,* or circuits, around the *bimah* ("pulpit" or "raised platform") or around the entire interior of the sanctuary, carrying the scrolls. In many places, the *hakkafot* occur indoors and continue outside in the street. Also, the *hakkafot*, which usually begin as a formal procession, often develop into less formal celebratory dance with the Torah scrolls and encircling the Torah scrolls.

During the *hakkafot*, participants chant *hoshanot,* liturgical poems which plead with God, "*Hoshia na,*" "Save, I pray!" *Hoshanot* represent a liturgical genre which dates

2. EJ "Simhat Torah."
3. JPS Tanach.
4. In most non-Orthodox congregations, both men and women participate in all of the rituals described. The Orthodox norm would be for only the men to participate in hakafot, and only men would carry the Torah scrolls and receive aliyot. However, with the rise of more egalitarian Orthodox communities, the level of participation of women today differs from congregation to congregation.

back to the Temple ritual on Sukkot and Hoshana Rabbah.[5] *Hakkafot* may take place on Erev Simchat Torah as well as the next morning, depending on the type of community. Hasidim, for instance, hold *hakkafot* on Shemini Atzeret eve.[6] As the ritual of *hakkafot* is the central concern of this thesis, they will be given thorough treatment in the chapters to follow.

As part of the principle of *simchah y'teirah*, ("increasing the joy"), all adult participants[7] are called up for *aliyot*. In order to provide for everyone, the final portion of Deuteronomy is repeated until all have had an *aliyah*. The person who recites the blessing over the final portion is called, *Chatan Torah* or "bridegroom of the Torah," and the one who recites the blessing over the portion from Genesis is called, *Chatan B'reishit,* or "bridegroom of Genesis." Reflecting children's special role in this holiday, all of the children who have not yet become bar or bat mitzvah are also called up for an *aliyah* called *kol han'arim* ("all of the children".)[8] Children also typically take part in the *hakkafot*, carrying things such as flags and miniature Torah scrolls.

## Origins and Development of the Holiday

### Torah, Mishnah, Talmud

5. See, Joseph Heinemann. *Prayer in the Talmud: Forms and Patterns.* (Revised version of the Hebrew original, *ha-Tefilah bi-tekufat ha-Tana'im veha-Amora'im* Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1st ed. 1964, 2nd ed. 1966. English Trans. Richard S. Sarason New York, 1977) 139-155.; According to Heinemann, the Hoshanot type of piyutim, of which this is an example, belong to the genre of "litanies." Litanies generally follow a pattern in which the leader offers prayers which are "made up of strings of brief cries or petitions, all similar, each of which is followed by a stereotype congregational response." He writes that this form of prayer arises in Temple ceremonies and is therefore a very early form of Jewish prayer. Heinemann concludes that the Hoshanot that we now associate with Simchat Torah began as litanies accompanying the *hakafot* around the altar on Sukkot and Hoshana Rabah.
6. EJ "Simhat Torah."
7. See footnote #3.
8. EJ "Simchat Torah."

Whereas the festival of Sukkot, including the eighth day, Shemini Atzeret, clearly finds its roots in Torah, Simchat Torah[9] develops in stages, eventually becoming a distinctive holiday with its own name, scriptural readings and practices. The practices which characterize Simchat Torah have their roots as early as the Bavli, whereas the name of the holiday comes much later, as we will see.

In Torah, Leviticus chapter 23 designates the first and eighth days of Sukkot as "sacred occasion[s]" of "complete rest" and outlines the observances of dwelling in booths and offering daily sacrifices. The origins of Shemini Atzeret lie in Leviticus 23:36, which calls the eighth day, "*atzeret.*" The new JPS translation of the Tanach renders, *atzeret* as, "solemn gathering," noting that the "precise meaning" of the word is "uncertain."[10] Hence, the eighth day of Sukkot already appears in Torah as a distinct holiday.

Neither the Mishnah nor the Bavli mentions Simchat Torah. However, the second day of Shemini Atzeret, with its own scriptural readings, slowly begins to take shape in the Bavli. Mishnah Megilah 3:5, which lists the Torah readings for the holidays, indicates that on the first day of Sukkot, one reads the portion about the holidays from Leviticus, chapter 23. On each of the remaining days of Sukkot, one reads the portion from Numbers about the sacrifice given on that day. The Mishnah does not refer to a special reading for Shemini Atzeret.

However, the Bavli on the above Mishnah introduces a *Baraita* which assigns special Torah and *haftarah* readings for Shemini Atzeret as well as for the day after

9. From this point onwards, I use the terms "second day of Shemini Atzeret" and "Simchat Torah" interchangeably. The term "Simchat Torah" does not come about until the rishonic period, in Spain, however I use the term for the sake of ease and clarity.
10. JPS Tanach, Lev. 23:36, note "d."

Shemini Atzeret.[11] The Bavli assigns the last portion of Deuteronomy, *V'zot Hab'rachah* as the Torah portion for the second day of Shemini Atzeret and designates the *haftarah* as I Kings 8:22, which begins with the words, "and Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of the whole community of Israel."[12] Although the Talmud does specify scriptural readings for the second day of Shemini Atzeret, it designates that day as the concluding day of Sukkot; not as a separate holiday with its own distinct meaning.

According to Moshe Yaged, "It seems quite conclusive that the final day of Sukkot was not celebrated as a Simhat Torah, a day celebrating. . . the conclusion of the Torah in the Talmudic era."[13] He posits that on the last day of Sukkot in Talmudic times, only *excerpts* from *V'zot Hab'rachah* were read in order to conclude the festivals "on a note of *brachah* (blessing)."[14] Girding his argument, he points out that the Talmud assigns a *haftarah* for that day which describes Solomon's blessings to the people who had gathered for the holiday. This theme parallels the Torah portion for the day, which describes Moses' blessings to the people before he dies.[15] Yaged speculates that the entire portion of *V'zot Hab'rachah,* specifically the actual account of Moses' death, was not read on the last day of Sukkot in the Talmudic era. Rather, the whole portion was probably read on a separate Shabbat.

Following Yaged's argument, the second day of Shemini Atzeret did not become a celebration of *siyyum* of the Torah reading cycle until the time of the geonim. However,

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11. BT Megilah 31a. The Baraita discusses the scriptural readings for "יום טוב אחרון" of the" ",חג"referring to Shemini Atzeret. Then it states, "למחר קורין וזאות הברכה," etc., referring to the day after Shemini Atzeret.
12. JPS Tanach.
13. Moshe Yaged, "The Biblical Readings for the Festival of Sukkot: Their Influence on Simhat Torah," *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy* 10 (1987-1988): 4-5.
14. Yaged 4-5.
15. Yaged 4-5.

whereas Yaged says that his argument is conclusive, it is not all that clear that the second day of Shemini Atzeret was not celebrated as a *simchat siyyum* in Palestine before the geonic period. The *haftarah* from I Kings could have served as part of a celebration of the completion of the Torah reading cycle. Furthermore, there is evidence that some kind of celebration of *siyyum* occured in Palestine before the geonic period, as we will further explain below.

**Geonic Period**

It is clear that the geonim celebrated the second day of Shemini Atzeret specifically as a *siyyum* ("completion") of the Torah reading for the year.[16] Because it became customary in the geonic period to complete the Torah reading every year on the same day, they could establish a specific date upon which to celebrate the completion in the Babylonian Jewish community.[17] However, the custom of celebrating the completion of the Torah reading cycle may have begun earlier, in the Palestinian community, even though they followed the triennial cycle of Torah reading.

In *Seder Rav Amram*, a *piyyut* of Palestinian origin was incorporated into the blessing over the *haftarah* on the second day of Shemini Atzeret. According to Yaari, this *piyyut*, which starts with the words *asher biglal avot banim gidel*, is from Palestine in the period before Kalir.[18] He posits that this *piyyut* was used in the Land of Israel when the triennial cycle of Torah reading came to a close every three or three and a half years.[19]

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16. Yaged 3.
17. Avraham Yaari, *Toldot Chag Simchat-Torah: Hishtalsh'lut Minhagav BaT'futzot Yisrael L'doroteihen* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1998) 15.
18. Yaari 22; According to EJ "Eleazar Kallir," scholars date Kalir as early as the late sixth century. Others date him to around the year 750.
19. Yaari 22.

Ezra Fleischer also quotes a 12th century manuscript which contains this *piyyut*. [20] It seems that we have an original Palestinian piyyut that was used in celebration of *siyyum* in the Land of Israel. By the time the piyyut makes its way to Bavel, it is written like a blessing and used on the second day of Shemini Atzeret, also in celebration of *siyyum*.

Moshe Yaged argues that the change in the *haftarah* reading from I Kings 8 to Joshua 1 indicates that the second day of Shemini Atzeret was newly becoming a *simchat siyyum* in the geonic period.[21] Alternatively, this *haftarah* from Joshua could simply represent what began as a second, parallel tradition that became mainstream in the late geonic period. The ninth century prayerbook, *Seder Rav Amram*, still indicates I Kings 8 as the standard *haftarah* for the day and mentions that some communities have started using the beginning of Joshua.[22] In the next generation of geonim, Saadiah Gaon establishes the new custom of the *haftarah* from Joshua in his *siddur*.[23]

One could argue that since Joshua 1 emphasizes the motif of the death of Moses, the end of the Torah, and the continuity of leadership through Joshua, it furthers the idea that although we have finished reading the Torah, we will begin again and continue to learn Torah in the coming year. According to the *Etz Hayim* chumash, "reading Joshua 1 after the end of the Torah highlights the shift from revelation to tradition."[24] Whereas Moses experienced direct revelation from God, Joshua received the teaching from Moses and

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20. Ezra Fleischer, *Eretz-Israel Prayer and Prayer Rituals as Portrayed in the Geniza Documents*. (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1988) 307 n. 59.; The manuscript quoted here is thought to be from the 12th century, at the earliest. It comes from a *siddur* used by a Jewish community in Egypt, following the Palestinian rite.; See also Fleischer 26.
21. Yaged 5.
22. Yaari 21.
23. Yaari 21.
24. David Lieber, ed., Michael Fishbane, Haftarah Commentary, *Etz Hayim Torah and Commentary* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 2001) 1266.

will pass it on to those who follow him, including those of us reading Torah today.[25] The chumash also theorizes that on the second day of Shemini Atzeret, it is possible that communities not only ended and began the Torah reading again but also ended the reading of Prophets and began again, with the beginning of Joshua.[26] Thematically, it makes sense that one would assign the beginning of Joshua as the *haftarah* for Simchat Torah. However, this does not rule out the possibility that in Palestine, before the geonim, communities celebrated the completion of the Torah reading cycle, using the original *haftarah* from I Kings. The *haftarah* selection from Joshua may simply be another tradition that was used in some communities and not in others.

In fact, although Simchat Torah had clearly become a celebration of *siyyum* by the geonic period, there was not complete agreement as to the correct *haftarah* for Simchat Torah as late as the Tosafot. The Tosafot to BT Megilah states, "There are some places whose custom it is to read the *haftarah* from 'And it came to pass after the death of Moses. . .'[Joshua 1] but this is a blunder because the *shas* does not say this. And there are those that say that Rav Hai Gaon established this custom. . .but we do not know the reason why he changed the ruling of the *shas.*" These Tosafists were clearly not happy with the idea that the geonim changed a custom from the Talmud. However, this displeasure is not connected to any question as to whether Simchat Torah was to be celebrated as a *simchat siyyum*. This further supports the possibility that the switch to Joshua has nothing to do with the second day of Shemini Atzeret becoming a *simchat siyyum*.

The custom of a *seudat siyyum* ("feast of completion") upon finishing the Torah

25. *Etz Hayim Torah and Commentary* 1266.
26. *Etz Hayim Torah and Commentary* 1266.

reading cycle also finds its roots in earlier Rabbinic sources. For instance, Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabbah[27], quotes II Kings 3, where, after receiving his wisdom from God in a dream, Solomon brings offerings and makes a celebratory feast.[28] In the midrash, Rabbi Eleazar learns from the example of Solomon that "a feast is made to celebrate the conclusion of the reading of the Torah."[29] Here we have evidence of a celebration upon concluding the cycle of Torah reading. Another source of *seudat siyyum* comes from the custom in the *yeshivah* of celebrating the completion of a tractate of Talmud.[30] In Tractate Shabbat, Abaye states, "May [a reward] be given to me, for whenever I see a young Talmudic scholar who has completed his tractate, I make a *yom tov* [holiday] for the rabbis."[31] Hence, the geonim had precedent for their custom of celebrating the completion of the Torah reading cycle.

It is important to note that Simchat Torah as a yearly celebration of the conclusion of the Torah reading took longer to establish itself in places that followed Palestinian custom. Some of these communities would complete the reading once in three years; others would complete the Torah in three and a half years. Even if individual Palestinian communities celebrated the completion of their Torah reading with a *seudat siyyum*, they didn't share a universal date of completion or celebration with all communities following the triennial cycle let alone with Babylonian communities following the annual cycle. This difference between Babylonian and Palestinian custom continued throughout the

27. According to EJ "Song of Songs Rabbah," this Midrash contains much tannaitic and amoraic material. It draws from the Yerushalmi, Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah and Pesikta d'Rav Kahana and was probably redacted in the Land of Israel in the mid 6th century.
28. Yaari 16, quoting Shir HaShirim Rabbah I:9.
29. Yaari 16, quoting Shir HaShirim Rabbah I:9.
30. Yaari 16.
31. BT Shabbat 118a-b.

Jewish world until the end of the time of the crusades.

During his travels in Egypt in 1170, Benjamin of Tudela witnessed the Jews from Babylonia and those from the Land of Israel each finishing the Torah reading on different days.[32] But, Benjamin continues, the Babylonian and the Palestinian communities had the custom of coming together to celebrate Simchat Torah and Shavuot.[33]

**Beyond Bavel**

Just as *minhag Bavel* won out over *minhag Eretz Yisrael*, with its custom of an annual cycle of Torah reading spreading to the Jewish communities of Spain, France and Ashkenaz, so too did the custom of celebrating the completion of Torah spread to these communities as the ninth day of Sukkot.[34] As Simchat Torah spread to the Diaspora, more customs developed around the holiday. First of all, the term, "Yom Simchat Torah" first appears one generation after the *geonim*, in Spain, in the *halachot* of Ibn Ghiyyat. The *geonim* used the terms, "יום אל-תבריך" (Day of Blessing), "יום ב' של שמיני עצרת" (Second day of Shemini Atzeret), "יום תשיעי של סוכות" (Ninth day of Sukkot), or "יום טוב אחרון של חג" (Final *Yom Tov* of the Holiday.) Ibn Ghiyyat, an 11th century *Rishon*, writes that on the ninth day of Sukkot, the day "in which we complete the Torah," it is Spanish custom "to make some adornments for the Torah scroll and say words of praise and thanksgiving in honor of the Torah scrolls. . . and the day is called Yom Simchat Torah (the day of rejoicing in the Torah)."[35]

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32. Yaari 15.
33. Yaari 15.
34. Yaari 16.
35. Yaari 29.

As we saw above, the conclusion of Deuteronomy had been read on Simchat Torah for some time now, either in Bavel, according to Yaari, or perhaps in Palestine as well. But we have not yet discussed the origins of today's custom of reading the beginning of the book of Genesis as well. The custom of reading the first portion of the book of Genesis on Simchat Torah also develops in the time of the rishonim.

According to Yaari, the reading from *B'reishit* began in the latter part of the 12th century in Spain and France, although the origin of the custom is rooted in the geonic period.[36] Some Babylonian communities in the geonic period had the custom of finishing the Torah reading cycle on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah or the Shabbat before Yom Kippur.[37] In these communities, during Minchah on Yom Kippur, someone would either read a few verses from *B'reishit* from the Torah scroll or recite the first three verses of the portion by heart.[38]

In the rishonic period, it became customary to read from *B'reishit* on Simchat Torah. David ben Joseph Abudarham, a 14th century Spanish rishon, summarizes the reasons for this custom: "so that the Accuser will not have an opportunity to bring charges, claiming that 'they have already finished it and they do not wish to read it any more.' The reason may also be to express the wish that 'as we have merited its completion may we also merit its beginning.'"[39]

In the mid 16th century, The Shulchan Aruch codifies Simchat Torah ritual in the following way:

> In places where two days of *yom tov* are observed, on the night before the ninth

36. Yaari 37.
37. Yaari 37.
38. Yaari 37.
39. Zevin 359.

> day they say *kiddush* and *zman*.[40] The next day, they take out three *sifrei Torah*. In one of them, *V'zot HaB'rachah* is read, until the end of the Torah. In the second scroll, *B'reishit* until, "*asher bara Elohim laasot*" (the work of creation which the Eternal had done, Genesis 2:3). In the third, the reader repeats the *maftir* from the day before and reads the *haftarah*, which is, "*Vay'hi acharei mot Moshe*" (And it came to pass after Moses' death, Joshua 1:1.)[41]

As we can see from the passage, by the time of the Shulchan Aruch, the reading of *B'reishit* was an integral part of the Simchat Torah ritual. The Shulchan Aruch also doesn't use the name "Simchat Torah" to refer to the ninth day. Isserles adds this detail to his gloss.[42]

Although *hakkafot* were already an integral part of the ritual for the week of Sukkot, and especially for the seventh day, Hoshana Rabbah, they were the last "link in the chain" of customs on Simchat Torah, in terms of development.[43] According to Yaari, the *Minhagim* of Rabbi Isaac of Tyrnau, of the late 14th- early 15th century, is the first to mention *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah.[44] However, there may be evidence from genizah fragments that *hakkafot* took place earlier. Much remains to be said about *hakkafot* as well as the role of celebratory dance on Simchat Torah in the following chapters.

**Conclusion**

Although the name, Simchat Torah, does not appear until the rishonic period in

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40. According to Marcus Jastrow's Dictionary of the Talmud, *z'man* refers to the section of the *kiddush* which mentions the festive season.
41. Shulchan Aruch, O.H. siman תרס"ט.
42. Rema on Shulchan Aruch, O.H. siman תרס"ט.
43. Yaari 12.
44. EJ "Hakkafot."

Spain, the custom of celebrating the completion of the Torah reading cycle came about much earlier. Starting out as the second day of Shemini Atzeret in the Diaspora, Simchat Torah may have originally served to close the holiday of Sukkot on a note of blessing, with its readings from *V'zot Hab'rachah* and from I Kings. The geonim formally instituted the second day of Shemini Atzeret as a day of celebrating the completion of the annual Torah reading cycle. However, there is evidence of some kind of celebration of *siyyum* in Palestine, before the geonic period. By the time of the rishonim, Simchat Torah stood apart as a holiday with its own distinctive name and characteristic practices, such as the reading of *parashat B'reishit*. Finally, the last layer of ritual, *hakkafot* with the Torah scrolls, was added as early as the 12th century and as late as the 14-15th century.

The *hakkafot* specifically, and dance more generally, came to characterize Simchat Torah as a whole and came to embody the meanings given to the holiday in each time and place examined in this study. We have already briefly begun to analyze early Palestinian and Babylonian customs and have even mentioned early rishonic debates. There is much more to be said, specifically about *hakkafot*, in these places already mentioned and all the more so in places we have yet to discuss. As will become clear in the chapters to follow, the practice of *hakkafot* took on meanings specific to the world views of the geonim, the Circle of the Zohar and the later strata of the Zohar, the Lurianic kabbalists, and the Chasidim. The early reformers, in Germany and the United States, as well as the Reform Jewish communities that followed also gave *hakkafot* their own meaning, which reflected who they were.

# Chapter Two

## *Hakkafot* from the Geonic Period through the Shulchan Aruch

### Introduction

Before we discuss the development of *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah from the geonic period through the Shulchan Aruch, let us revisit some basic information concerning the Sukkot calendar. Sukkot begins on the 15th of Tishrei and lasts for eight days in Israel and nine days in the Diaspora. The first and last days of Sukkot are holidays of complete rest. Hoshana Rabbah falls on the seventh day of Sukkot and is understood to be a day of judgment. The motif of judgment may come from the Mishnaic conception that God decides how much rain the world will receive in the coming year.[1] Shemini Atzeret falls on the eighth day of Sukkot. In Diaspora communities which celebrate two days of a holiday, Simchat Torah falls on the 23rd of Tishrei, the second day of Shemini Atzeret. In Israel, and in Reform Jewish communities in the Diaspora, Simchat Torah falls on the 22nd of Tishrei, the same day as Shemini Atzeret.

We will recall that the name, "Simchat Torah," did not appear until the rishonic period, in the works of Ibn Ghiyyat. Talmudic and geonic texts refer to that date as "the second day of Shemini Atzeret," and the geonim also referred to the day as "the ninth day of Sukkot" or "the final *yom tov* of the holiday."[2]

In most Jewish communities today, Simchat Torah is characterized by the practice of seven *hakkafot* around the synagogue with the Torah scrolls. Most Orthodox and

1. EJ "Hoshana Rabba."
2. In this chapter, I use the terms "Simchat Torah" and "second day of Shemini Atzeret" interchangeably.

Conservative synagogues perform *hakkafot* both evening and morning of Simchat Torah. Reform synagogues generally do so at the same times but on Shemini Atzeret, since they do not usually observe the second day of a holiday.[3] The *hakkafot* usually start out as formal processions around the synagogue but then often develop into less formal celebratory dancing with and around the Torah scrolls.

These customs of dance and *hakkafot* did not arise suddenly. Rather they result from a long process of evolution which we will trace in this chapter. The practice of *hakkafot* developed in the Talmudic period as a ritual specific to Sukkot and Hoshana Rabbah and made its way into Simchat Torah practice later. Dance was part of the celebration of the completion of the Torah-reading cycle from at least as early as the geonic period only to disappear and reappear as part of Simchat Torah practice in various times and places.

## Geonic Period

### *Hakkafot*

Much of the history of these practices has been studied extensively by Abraham Yaari. He contends that our current practice of making seven *hakkafot* around the synagogue on Simchat Torah does not come about until the final third of the 16th century, in Tsfat, even though in general, *hakkafot* had been part of the celebratory atmosphere of Sukkot and Hoshana Rabbah from the time of the Temple.[4] By the time of the rishonim, some Diaspora communities do at least one *hakkafah* on Simchat Torah. Dance already plays a central role in the celebration of Simchat Torah by the time of the

3. Reform practice will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.
4. Yaari 261.

geonim, if not earlier. As Yaari does not discuss the particular role of dance on Simchat Torah, I will add that element of analysis in this study.

As we see in Mishnah Sukkah, the *hakkafot* that we associate with Sukkot and Simchat Torah begin as circuits with the *lulav* around the Temple altar: once each day of Sukkot and seven times on the seventh day.[5] The Bavli does not discuss the practice of *hakkafot* during the post-Temple period, so it is hard to say precisely what form of the custom may have prevailed between the time of the second Temple and that of the Babylonian geonim.[6]

However, we do know that these circular movements in sacred space do carry over to Sukkot ritual in the geonic synagogue. To begin with, in his *siddur*, Saadiah Gaon describes the custom of circling the *teivah*[7] in the synagogue once each day of Sukkot and seven times on Hoshana Rabbah.[8] He also mentions a practice in his time of doing three *hakkafot* every day of Sukkot and seven on the seventh day.[9] In a responsum on the same matter, Hai Gaon writes, "It is our custom and the custom of our forefathers that every day [of Sukkot] we circle the *teivah* three times, and seven times on Yom Aravah [Hoshana Rabbah.] It is a widespread custom in all of Israel; we have heard of no place that does not practice it."[10]

These two geonic sources show fluidity in terms of how many *hakkafot* were

5. M. Sukkah 3:12; M. Sukkah 4:5.
6. EJ "Hakkafot."
7. While in the Mishnah, the *teivah* refers to the ark where the Torah scrolls are kept, this term takes on a different meaning thereafter. For Sephardim, the *teivah* refers to the *bimah*, or raised platform from where the rabbi or cantor reads Torah and leads services. In most of our texts, the *teivah* generally refers to a moveable structure which served as a *bimah*. According the EJ "Ark," "the scrolls were originally kept in a movable receptacle which served both as their repository and as a pulpit.
8. Yaari 259.
9. Yaari 259.
10. Yaari 259, quoting Hilchot R. Isaac Ibn Ghiyyat, Hilchot Lulav, siman 244.

performed on each day of Sukkot. We do find consistency in that seven *hakkafot* were performed on Hoshana Rabbah, but as Saadiah Gaon's description indicates, there were at least two different traditions as to how many *hakkafot* (one or three) to perform on the other days of Sukkot. Notwithstanding the diversity in practice, a basic motif remains. For Jews in both Temple and geonic times, Sukkot involved making circles around the ritual meeting place of Israel and God: the loci of sacrifice and of Torah, respectively. Although our sources don't mention *hakkafot* in the post-Temple period, it is likely that the custom moved from the Temple to the Palestinian synagogue after the Temple was destroyed. We could then speculate that the geonim continued this tradition of doing *hakkafot* in the synagogue.

*Dance*

By the time of the geonim, the second day of Shemini Atzeret (Simchat Torah) had already come to celebrate of the completion of the Torah reading cycle.[11] Although there is no evidence of *hakkafot* then, a geonic *teshuvah* informs us that dance played an important role in the celebration. As Yaari says, "Customs frequently raised concern in their time that they contradicted Jewish law. The sages of that generation were asked about them, and they responded in various ways. . . . Often these *teshuvot* are the only source of our knowledge that these customs existed in a certain community and at a certain time."[12]

According to Yaari, four customs on Simchat Torah are questioned by geonic responsa literature: lighting coals and incense to create smoke in front of the Torah scroll;

11. See chapter 1 of this study.
12. Yaari 12.

dancing during the recital of *piyyutim*; decorating the scroll with jewelry; and taking the scroll out of its *tik* (case or holder).[13] Regarding the question of dancing, Natronai, the Gaon of Sura from 853-858,[14] writes the following responsum:

> וביום טוב שני זה [של שמיני עצרת] שהוא אחרון, רגילין אצלנו שמרקדין אפילו כמה זקינים בשעתה שאומרים קלוסין לתורה, אלא שזו משום שבות היא, ונהגו בה היתר ביום זה בלבד לכבוד התורה.[15]

> On the second *yom tov* [of Shemini Atzeret,] which is the last day, we are accustomed to dance--even some of the elders--during the singing of praises for the Torah. Even though [dancing] is prohibited by a Rabbinic enactment [regarding rest on the Sabbath and Festivals,] it is relaxed only on this day, specifically in honor of the Torah.[16]

The Rabbinic enactment or *sh'vut* which Natronai Gaon cites in the above responsum comes from Mishnah Beitzah 5:2: "Any act that is prohibited for the reasons of *sh'vut*. . . on the Sabbath is prohibited [also] on *yom tov*. These are the acts prohibited for the reason of *sh'vut*: climbing a tree, riding on an animal, swimming in water, clapping one's hands, slapping one's thighs, and dancing."[17] A *sh'vut* is a Rabbinic enactment regarding refraining from work on Shabbat and holidays. The Bavli on the above Mishnah treats the last three actions of hand-clapping (מטפחין), thigh-slapping (מספקין) and dancing

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13. Yaari 23-26. Originating in 10th century Babylonia, the *tik* is a cylindrical or octagonal wooden case for the Torah scroll. It has hinges and opens up for reading. The scroll usually stays in the *tik* and is placed in an upright position for reading. See Ellen Frankel and Betsy Platikin Teutsch *Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1992) 178-179.
14. Probably Natronai bar Hilai, a prolific writer of responsa, particularly regarding liturgy. See EJ "Natronai bar Hilai."
15. *Shaarei T'shuvah* (Leipzig 1858) siman 314.
16. My translation.
17. M. Beitzah 5:2.

(מרקדין) as a group, explaining the prohibition of all three as, "lest it be necessary to repair a musical instrument."[18] Hence, Mishnah and Talmud prohibit dancing on Shabbat and *yom tov* because it might involve the use of musical instruments which one might be tempted to repair should they break. In his responsum, Natronai Gaon makes an exception to this rule on one day of the year: the day set aside for celebrating the completion of the Torah reading cycle.

We might speculate that if the celebration of *simchat siyyum* originated in Palestine,[19] dance may have been a part of this day's festivities from its beginnings. In fact, looking back at the Mishnah, we might hypothesize that people in that period were generally engaging in clapping, slapping and dancing on Shabbat and *yom tov*. Only if people were already dancing would the Mishnah have found it necessary to explicitly prohibit it.

Natronai's responsum shows that dancing was part of normative Simchat Torah practice at least by geonic times. In fact, for Natronai Gaon, dancing seems to outweigh other common practices in their importance for celebrating the *siyyum*. For instance, in the very same responsum where Natronai allows for dancing on Simchat Torah, he still follows the Mishnah, prohibiting the practice of lighting incense and coals in front of the Torah scrolls.[20]

Unfortunately, we do not know where Natronai directs this responsum. This information would clarify where, besides Babylonia, Jews were dancing on Simchat Torah. We do know that Natronai bar Hilai had a close connection with the Jewish

18. B.T. Beitza 36b
19. See chapter 1 of this study.
20. Yaari 24.

community of Lucena, Spain, to whom he wrote many liturgical responsa.[21] However, if dance did occur in Spain on Simchat Torah, I have found no evidence to that effect in other geonic sources or even in the later literature of the rishonic period.

Interestingly, geonic sources reveal no relationship between dance and *hakkafot*. *Hakkafot* were limited to the first seven days of Sukkot, whereas dance may have always been one of the special customs, if not the central custom, involved in celebrating Sukkot as well as the completion of the Torah reading cycle.

**Rishonim through the Shulchan Aruch and Isserles**

*Hakkafot on Sukkot and Hoshana Rabbah*

The rishonim continue the ancient practice of *hakkafot* on Sukkot and Hoshana Rabbah, and they add some elements of their own. Rabbi Isaac Ibn Ghiyyat (11th century, Spain) quotes Hai Gaon's reponsum which describes the circling of the *teivah* once every day of Sukkot and seven times on Hoshana Rabbah.[22] He adds that the Spanish custom, "for generation after generation, is to stand the Torah scroll on top of the *teivah* and to circle it once . . . each day [of Sukkot] . . . and on the seventh day we circle the Torah scroll with willows . . . seven times."[23]

Ibn Ghiyyat adds the element of placing a Torah scroll on the *teivah* for the *hakkafot*. Here he uses the term *teivah* to refer to a surface upon which one could place the scroll. He is probably describing the "movable receptacle" which may have been used both as a *bimah* and as a cabinet for the scrolls.[24] In any event, as is his style, Ibn Ghiyyat

21. EJ "Natronai bar Hilai."
22. See footnote 12.
23. Yaari 259, quoting Hilchot R. Isaac Ibn Ghiyyat, Hilchot Lulav, siman 244.
24. See footnote 6 above.

describes the geonic custom as well as the custom of his own community, showing where they differ.[25]

*Midrash T'hilim*[26] describes another variation on the theme of circling the Torah:

> All the people, young and old, hold *lulavim* . . . and *etrogim* . . . and circle once [each day of Sukkot.] On that same day [of Hoshana Rabbah] they circle seven times . . . . So that it might be acceptable in a [future] time when there is a [Temple] altar, in *our* time, the chazan of the synagogue stands like an angel of God with the Torah scroll in his arms while the people circle him as he stands in place of the altar.[27] (my emphasis)

Since *Midrash T'hilim* contains material from the third to the 13th century, we do not know what "our time" refers to, but in the 12th century, Maimonides also mentions the practice of placing a *teivah* in the center of the synagogue and circling it every day, "in the manner that they would circle the altar, in memory of the Temple."[28] In Maimonides' case, the *teivah* seems to be a movable structure, which served as a *bimah.* We may also speculate that in Sephardi communities, whose Torah scrolls was in a hard metal or wooden case, they could stand the scroll on top of the *teivah.* In Ashkenazi communities, whose Torah scrolls were covered in a soft cloth, a person would hold the scroll in the center of the *hakkafot.*[29]

As we can see in *Midrash T'hilim* as well as in Maimonides, one of the reasons

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25. Lawrence Hoffman, *The Canonization of the Synagogue Service* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979) 117.
26. According to EJ, recent scholarship sees Midrash T'hilim as developing over many centuries. It contains material from as early as the third and as late as the 13th century. See EJ "Midrash Tehillim."
27. Yaari 259, quoting Yalkut Shimoni, T'hilim, end of remez תשג"ו.
28. Yaari 260, quoting Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Lulav 7:23.
29. We will see another example of circling a person holding the scroll in *Machzor Vitry*, below.

for performing *hakkafot* in the synagogue on Sukkot and Hoshana Rabbah was in order to reenact or symbolize the Temple rituals that took place on those holidays. Maimonides uses the words, "זכר למקדש," (remembrance of the Temple), to explain a reenactment of the Temple ritual in a post-Temple context. Similarly, *Midrash T'hilim* describes the act of circling the chazan, with the Torah scroll in his arms, as "דוגמת המזבח," (symbolizing or exemplifying the altar). In this instance, the ritual strives to transform the chazan with the Torah scroll into an image or likeness of the original Temple altar. In the post-Temple ritual, the Torah scroll evokes the original Temple altar and allows the post-Temple community to observe Sukkot in an authentic way.

Rabbi Aaron ben Jacob ha-Cohen of Lunel (end of 13th, beginning of 14th-century, Provence) picks up on a different strand of meaning for the *hakkafot*, from the Talmud Yerushalmi. The Yerushalmi connects the seven *hakkafot* on Hoshana Rabbah to the seven circles that the Israelites made around the walls of Jericho when it says, "On that day [Hoshana Rabbah] the altar is circled seven times. Rav Acha said, this is in memory of Jericho.[30] In his work, *Orchot Chayim,* Aaron ha-Cohen first describes the custom of placing the *teivah* at the center of the room and circling it as זכר למקדש, as does Maimonides.[31] Then he adds the idea that the seven *hakkafot* "correspond to the seven times that the Israelites circled Jericho."[32]

Other scholars from 12th and 13th century Spain and Ashkenaz add a mystical layer to the theme of *hakkafot* as representing the past victory of the Israelites over

30. Talmud Yerushalmi, Sukkah chapter 4, end of halachah 3; Book of Joshua 6:14-15.
31. In Provence, the Torah scroll was kept in a hard metal case, as in Sephardi communities. Hence, Aaron Ha-Cohen's community placed their scroll on top of the *teivah*, as did Maimonides and Ibn Ghiyyat.
32. Yaari 260, quoting Orchot Chayim l'Rav Aharon HaCohen m'Lunel, Hilchot Lulav siman 33.

Jericho or hastening a future victory of Jews over their oppressors. One of the Chasidei Ashkenaz, Eleazar of Worms, adds the element of praying for rain to the complex of symbolism surrounding *hakkafot*. The next chapter of this study will further investigate the understanding of *hakkafot* in kabbalistic literature.

As we have seen above, the two Talmuds and rishonic literature link *hakkafot* on Sukkot/Hoshana Rabbah either to the memory of the Temple altar or to the military victory in Jericho. Yaari contends that the motif of military victory in Jericho specifically corresponds to the seventh *hakkafah* on Hoshana Rabbah, because the fall of Jericho happens on the seventh day and Hoshana Rabbah is the seventh day of Sukkot.[33] Therefore, for Yaari, the theme of military victory does not carry over to the eventual practice of *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah.[34] However, *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah do continue to stand for the original ritual of circling the Temple altar.

*Hakkafot on Simchat Torah*

The above examples of *hakkafot* from Ibn Ghiyyat, *Midrash T'hilim* and Maimonides, place the Torah scroll at the center of the ritual for Sukkot and Hoshana Rabbah, in memory of the Temple altar. However neither Ibn Ghiyyat (Spain) nor Maimonides (Spain and Egypt) mentions taking out Torah scrolls or performing *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah. These customs were not present in Spain in the rishonic period, as we see in the Tur and, later, the Shulchan Aruch, neither of which refer to these practices taking place there.[35]

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33. Yaari 261.
34. Yaari 261.
35. Yaari 262.

In rishonic France and Ashkenaz, however, the Torah scrolls did play a central role on Simchat Torah. Many communities would take all or some of the Torah scrolls out of the ark on either the evening or morning of Simchat Torah. Beginning in the 14th century, in some Ashkenazi communities, it became customary on *Leil* Simchat Torah to take all of the scrolls out of the ark, make one *hakkafah* around the *migdal* (raised platform), and return the scrolls to the ark.[36]

In Northern France, during Rashi's time, communities would take the scrolls out on Simchat Torah morning, before the Torah reading. *Machzor Vitry* describes a Hoshana Rabbah custom of taking out all of the Torah scrolls, not only the ones necessary for the day's Torah reading, and of doing the same on Simchat Torah.[37] According to Yaari, this French community did not perform *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah.[38] However, a verb in *Machzor Vitry*'s description of Simchat Torah hints at some kind of physical movement with a Torah scroll. It describes how, before returning the scroll to the ark, the prayer leader would take slow steps (מעט מעט פוסע) while reciting the verses of the alphabetic *piyyut Ana Adonai, hoshia na*.[39] Then he would ascend the *migdal* and finish the *piyyut* with the verse, *al hakol*.[40] From this description, it seems that the prayer leader walked down from the *migdal* with the scroll in his arms while chanting the *piyyut*. He may have even processed with the scroll, or at least walked with it, as the verb, פוסע (step), seems to indicate. Only then did he go back up to the *migdal*.

In Provence, some communities would take all of the scrolls out of the ark *after*

36. In fact, the custom of *hakkafot* with the Torah scrolls on Simchat Torah may have developed earlier, as a genizah manuscript shows. We will discuss this further below.
37. Yaari 261, quoting *Machzor Vitry*.
38. Yaari 261.
39. Yaari 262, quoting *Machzor Vitry*.
40. Yaari 262, quoting *Machzor Vitry*.

the Torah reading on Simchat Torah day. According to the Tur, these French communities would say a separate *piyyut* as each Torah scroll was removed.[41] Among the many *piyyutim* they would sing was, *Asher biglal avot banim gidel*.[42] Aaron ha-Cohen of Lunel (late13th, early 14th century-Provence) goes into more detail: after the *haftarah*, the prayer leader would chant *Ashrei* while standing on the *migdal* with the Torah scroll.[43] Then, each elder of the community would take a scroll from the ark, stand on the *migdal*, and recite verses lamenting Moses'death.[44]

*Sefer Minhagim*, from the school of Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg in the Rhine river valley, is the first to describe the custom of taking out (but not yet processing with) all of the Torah scrolls on *Leil* Simchat Torah.[45] Between the *minchah* and *maariv* services, the prayer leader would recite *Atah hareita* and take all of the scrolls out of the ark. According to Yaari, this Ashkenazi custom dates back to the 14th century.[46]

According to Yaari, Rabbi Isaac of Tyrnau (late 14th-early 15th century, Austria) is the first to describe the custom of a *hakkafah* with the Torah scrolls on *Leil* Simchat Torah. However, a genizah manuscript seems to date this practice much earlier. Ezra Fleischer quotes a 12th century manuscript which describes how the Jewish community in Fustat, Egypt celebrated the second day of Shemini Atzeret. After completing the reading of Deuteronomy, "They would circle the synagogue with the scrolls, making three *hakkafot*. . . ."[47] Fleischer places this practice in a Babylonian synagogue, he does

41. Yaari, quoting Tur O.H. siman תרס"ח.
42. See chapter 1 of this study for a discussion of this *piyyut*.
43. Yaari 262.
44. Yaari 262.
45. Yaari 262.
46. Yaari 262. Whereas R. Meir of Rothenberg died in 1293, his followers continued to record and pass on his teachings after his death.
47. Fleischer 307.

not explain why his manuscript led him to this conclusion.[48] While we do not have clear evidence as to the origins of the practice, this manuscript does show that *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah had developed by the 12th century and was not limited to Ashkenaz, but was practiced in Egypt too.

The next account of *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah does come from Isaac Tyrnau, in 14th century Ashkenaz. According to Yaari, Tyrnau is not describing his own community in Austria, which did not observe this custom.[49] Rather, he is referring to the same Rhineland communities whose practice the school of R. Meir of Rothenberg describes above. Tyrnau first describes how the *piyyut Atah Hareita* is recited before taking out the scrolls during the day, and then adds:

וביש מקומות אומרין אותה גם בלילה לפני הוצאת ספר תורה,
ומפקינן כל ספרי תורה שבארון ושליח צבור אומר שמע ישראל,
אחד, גדלו, ועומד אצל המגדל ואומר אנא יי הושיעה נא כאמש, רק
שאין מסבב המגדל. . . .[50]

There are some places which say it [*atah hareita*] also at night, before taking out the Torah scroll. They take out all of the Torah scrolls that are in the ark and the prayer leader says, *Sh'ma Yisrael, Echad, Gadlu,* and stands by the *migdal* and says, *Ana Adonai Hoshia Na* like the night before, only he does not

48. Fleischer 307-308, notes 58 and 62; According to Fleischer, the custom described in this manuscript comes from Bavel and not Palestine. However, we don't know how he knows this. He refers us, in note 62, to responsa by Hai and Sherira Gaon as quoted by R. Isaac Ghiyyat as well as the *Mavo* to *Machzor l'Sukkot* by Goldschmidt-Frankel. However, neither of these sources describes *hakkafot* on the second day of Shemini Atzeret. Rather, they only escribe *hakkafot* with the *lulav* and *aravah* on only Sukkot and Hoshana Rabbah. Perhaps Fleischer only means to indicate that the general custom of *hakkafot* around the synagogue on Sukkot comes from Babylon and not Palestine. That said, we don't know if, in the period between the second Temple and the geonim, Palestinian communities were or were not doing *hakkafot*.
49. Yaari 263.
50. Yaari 263, quoting *Minhagim l'Rav Isaac Tyrnau*, Halachot Shemini Atzeret.

circle the *migdal*.[51]

Here, Tyrnau describes the ritual on Simchat Torah morning. By way of contrast, he mentions that in the morning service, the people holding the scrolls do not circle the *migdal* as they did the night before. Thus, we conclude that on *Leil* Simchat Torah, the Jewish communities of the Rhineland remove all of the scrolls and walk around the *migdal* before returning the scrolls to the ark. According to Yaari, they would not do a *hakkafah* around the *migdal* on Simchat Torah morning because three of the scrolls were kept out for the Torah readings and the others were spread throughout the congregation so that all of the men could have an *aliyah*.[52]

As stated above, the practice of a *hakkafah* on Simchat Torah was not present in Spain and does not appear in the Shulchan Aruch, Joseph Caro's code of the mid 16th century. However, Moses Isserles adds the aspect of *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah in his Ashkenazi gloss to the Shulchan Aruch. There, he writes:

> It is the custom in these lands [Ashkenaz] to take out all of the Torah scrolls that are in the ark on Simchat Torah, at *ar'vit* and *shacharit* and to sing songs and praises. . . . Additionally, it is the custom to circle (להקיף) the *bimah* in the synagogue with the Torah scrolls, just as we do with the *lulav*. All of this is for the purpose of rejoicing (משום שמחה.)[53]

Hence, by the time of Isserles (mid 16th century) the custom of making a *hakkafah* with the Torah scrolls in the morning and evening had spread throughout Ashkenaz.

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51. My translation.
52. Yaari 263.
53. Rema, Shulchan Aruch, O.H. siman תרס"ת.

**Conclusion**

The custom of *hakkafot* has a long and complex history. Beginning as a Temple ritual for Sukkot and Hoshana Rabbah, post-Temple communities adapted the ritual, as well as its meaning, to the synagogue context. Geonic communities did *hakkafot* with their *lulavim*, *etrogim*, and *aravot* around the *teivah*, probably a movable structure which served as a *bimah* and which may have contained the Torah scrolls. They do not mention placing a scroll on the *teivah* during the *hakkafot*. In rishonic times, Sephardic communities placed a Torah scroll on the *teivah* (*bimah*) and circled it, in memory of the Temple altar. They could do this, since their Torah scroll was kept in a hard casement. *Machzor Vitry* as well as *Midrash T'hilim* describe circling a person who was holding the Torah scroll. Later, certain Ashkenazi communities circled a raised platform while carrying the Torah scrolls. We might speculate that Ashkenazi communities held their Torah scrolls for the *hakkafot* since they kept the scrolls in a soft covering and couldn't stand them up on the *bimah*.

While we have no evidence of the geonim performing *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah, an Egyptian community in the 12th century engaged in *hakkafot* on this day, holding Torah scrolls in their arms. While Spanish communities of the rishonic period did not perform *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah, French and Ashkenazi communities of that period had the custom of taking the scrolls out of the ark on that day. Some Ashkenazi communities, starting in the 14th century, even made one *hakkafah* around the *migdal* on Simchat Torah.

The practice of taking out all of the Torah scrolls serves to distinguish Simchat Torah from the days that precede it as one centered around Torah and the completion of

the Torah reading cycle. Moreover, the *hakkafah* with the Torah scrolls links Simchat Torah with Sukkot and Hoshana Rabbah, where *hakkafot* also occured in memory of the Temple altar. In the cases where the Torah is placed at the center, either on the *teivah* or in someone's arms, the Torah certainly transforms the ritual into one of circling the Temple altar. However, circling the *migdal* with the scrolls in one's arms might have a different effect. I might venture a guess that *hakkafot* while carrying the scrolls emphasizes the celebration of *siyyum* more than the memory of the Temple altar. In a community which has read Torah together for an entire year, carrying the scrolls in a circle physically brings the Torah into the community and symbolizes the never-ending cycle of Torah-reading

While the geonim did not engage in *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah, a responsum demonstrates that communities would engage in celebratory dancing on that day. In contrast, the rishonim do not mention dancing as a Simchat Torah custom. The fact that rishonic communities didn't dance on Simchat Torah does not necessarily mean that the aspect of *simchah* (rejoicing) was missing from their celebration. As we read above, Isserles gives the reason for taking out all of the Torah scrolls and doing the *hakkafah* as *mishum simchah,* "for the purpose of rejoicing."[54] We might conclude that the practice of circling with the scrolls creates an atmosphere of rejoicing. These rishonic Jewish communities rejoiced not only as they recreated the celebration around the Temple altar but also as they celebrated the completion and continuity of their own Torah-reading cycle.

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54. Rema, Shulchan Aruch, O.H. siman תרס"ת

# Chapter Three

## *Hakkafot* in the Zohar and Lurianic Kabbalah

### Introduction

While by the time of the rishonim, Simchat Torah had taken shape as a distinct holiday with its own distinct practices, the kabbalists took the meaning and practice of the holiday to a new level. According to Yaari, the practice of seven *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah emerged in 16th-century Tsfat, during the time of Isaac Luria.[1] Luria's students described their master's practice of *hakkafot* and attributed theosophical meaning to it. The custom of dancing on Simchat Torah also reappeared in Lurianic communities. As Lurianic kabbalah spread from Tsfat to the Diaspora, so did the Simchat Torah practices of *hakkafot* and dance. We see this most clearly among the Chasidim in 18th-century Eastern Europe. In order to understand Luria's innovations and their meaning, let us first examine some earlier kabbalistic texts, from the Zohar, the *Ra'aya Meheimna* and *Tikkunei ha-Zohar*.[2] These texts from 13th century Spain lay the conceptual groundwork upon which Luria and his followers build their Simchat Torah ritual.

### The Zohar, *Ra'aya Meheimna*, and *Tikkunei ha-Zohar*

The Zohar and its later strata interpret the holidays of Sukkot, Hoshana Rabbah, Shemini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah using theosophical symbolism.[3] In the following

1. Yaari 261.
2. Many unanswered questions remain as to the identity of the Zohar's author and the date of its writing. It is generally accepted that the main body of the Zohar written and published piecemeal by the Spanish mystic, Moses de Leon (d. 1305). The *Ra'aya Meheimna* and *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* represent later, independent strata, the authors of which are unknown.
3. For a full discussion of kabbalistic symbolism, consult Moshe Idel *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*;

texts, all aspects of these holidays from the altar to the Torah scroll to the crown on the Torah scroll are inscribed with symbolism related to the sefirotic system. For the kabbalists, the observance of these holidays has theurgic power: proper observance in the earthly realm effects processes in the sefirotic realm which in turn have an effect on the relationship between the mystics and God. These texts see the entire time period from Rosh Hashanah leading up to Shemini Atzeret-Simchat Torah as preparing for the unification of the male and female aspects of the sefirotic realm. Unification, understood as divine sexual intercourse, occurs on Simchat Torah.

The first text offers a symbolic explanation of the *hakkafot* on Hoshana Rabbah. For the Zohar, the *hakkafot* move God closer to unification with the *Shechinah*:

> אמר מזבח למלכא קדישא לכלהו משתכחי מאנין וחולקין ולי מה אנת יהיבו! אמר ליה בכל יומא ויומא יסובבין ליך , שבעה יומין עלאין לברכא לך ויהבין לך שבעה חולקין. . . ולבתר שבעה זמנין לקבל כל אינון שבעה יומין בגין לקיימא לה ברכאן מן מבועא דנחלא דנגיד תדיר ולא פסיק.[4]
>
> The altar said to the Holy King: Everyone else receives gifts and portions. What are you going to give me? He said to her: Every day the seven supernal days will encircle you, in order to bless you, and they will give you seven portions. . . . And afterward, seven times, to match the whole seven days, in order to provide her with blessings from the source of the stream that flows continuously without pause.[5]

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Gershom Scholem *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*; David Ariel *The Mystic Quest.*

4. Bar Ilan CD-Rom, Zohar III 24b.
5. Isaiah Tishby. *The Wisdom of the Zohar,* vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) 1252-1253. Translation of Zohar III 24b.

In this text, the altar stands for the *Shechinah*.[6] She is complaining about the seventy bullocks which were offered on Sukkot.[7] Talmudic and Midrashic sources express the idea that these offerings were given on behalf of the seventy nations of the world, and the *Shechinah* questions why the seventy nations receive offerings and she does not.[8] The Zohar explains the circling of the altar once a day during Sukkot and seven times on Hoshana Rabbah as a way to mollify the *Shechinah* and bless her.

On the most basic level, the *hakkafot* symbolize sacrificial offerings or gifts to the *Shechinah*, the aspect of God to which humans have access. On the theosophical level, however, the *hakkafot* symbolize the "seven supernal days," meaning the seven lower *sefirot*. As the people circle the altar with their willows, they cause a process to occur in the sefirotic realm in which the seven lower *sefirot* encircle and bless the *sefirah* of *Shechinah*. This process in the divine realm provides the *Shechinah* with the divine flow from *Keter*, the highest *sefirah*. In our text, *Keter* is known as the "source of the stream that flows continuously without pause." As the *sefirot* encircle the *Shechinah* and as she begins to receive the divine flow, the time for divine intercourse draws near.

This image of a flow down to *Shechinah* has the clear sexual connotation of semen flowing into this lowest of the *sefirot*. According to Elliot Wolfson, the process of humans causing a flow from the sefirotic realm is a common motif in the Zohar. He writes, "The righteous below have the power to elevate the *Shechinah* by becoming the female waters that arouse the male waters above, which results in the union of the male and female.[9] To be even more graphic, the *hakkafot* serve to lubricate the *Shechinah* in

6. Tishby 1252.
7. Numbers 29: 12-39.
8. Tishby 1252-3.
9. Elliot Wolfson. "Coronation of the Sabbath Bride: Kabbalistic Myth and the Ritual of Androgynisation"

preparation for divine intercourse. As we shall see, the Lurianic kabbalists use similar imagery when they interpret the *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah.

The concept of *hakkafot* causing a flow from the heavenly realm also has roots in an earlier mystical interpretation of Simchat Torah, from Eleazar of Worms (c.1165-c.1230) of Chasidei Ashkenaz. In *Sefer HaRokeach*, he discusses the connection of the *hakkafot* to praying for rain on Hoshana Rabbah:

> Because Jericho is the first of the battles in Eretz Yisrael and we attribute all first things to the Holy Blessed One. . . and because it is written in Kings regarding Jericho: 'There will be no dew or rain except at my bidding'(I Kings 17:1), we conclude that we circle [on Hoshana Rabbah] as they did in Jericho for the purpose of bringing dew and rain . . . .[10]

In *Sefer HaRokeach* the *hakkafot* play a central role in propitiating God for rain. The role of *hakkafot* in praying for rain is a common motif on Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret, even prior to the Middle Ages. We can see it here as well as in the Zohar text above, which interprets *hakkafot* as initiating the divine flow.

The next zoharic text discusses the combined festival of Shemini Atzeret-Simchat Torah:

> If you ask, "Why is it called *atzeret*?" It means that all of the prior days [of Sukkot] were feasts for the branches of the tree. . . . Afterwards is the joy of the tree itself and the joy of the Torah. For this purpose there is one day, *atzeret*. The joy of the Torah is joy of the tree itself. Therefore, on this day there is a

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*The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 6 (1997): 328.

10. Yaari 260; Quoting Sefer HaRokeach, Hilchot Sukkah, siman רכ"א.

> portion only for the Holy One, blessed by He, and the Assembly of Israel. Consequently, "There shall be a solemn assembly [*atzeret*] for you" (Numbers 29:35) --for you, and for no one else.[11]

In this text, the Zohar asks why the eighth day of Sukkot is specifically named *atzeret*, which has the basic meaning of "gathering," when the other seven days of Sukkot involve gatherings as well. The Zohar interprets the first seven days of Sukkot as festive gatherings for the "branches of the tree," or the seven lower *sefirot*. Each of the seven days of Sukkot stands for one of the "branches of the tree."[12] However, one day, Shemini Atzeret, is set aside to celebrate the gathering or unification of the Assembly of Israel and God.

More precisely, Shemini Atzeret celebrates the unification of the male and female aspects of God, symbolized by the *sefirot* of *Tiferet* and *Malchut*, respectively. Furthermore, the "joy of the tree" and the "joy of the Torah" stand for the *sefirot* of *Tiferet* and *Malchut*. The masculine *Tiferet* corresponds to "the tree itself," perhaps referring to the phallic image of a tree trunk, and the feminine *Malchut* corresponds to the Torah. In kabbalistic literature *Malchut* often corresponds to the Torah as well as to the community of Israel. On Shemini Atzeret-Simchat Torah, the community of Israel rejoices in the Torah, or *Shechinah*, thereby causing *Tiferet* to rejoice in and unite with *Shechinah*. Thus, as God and the community of Israel come together through the medium of Torah, the godhead is unified.

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11. Tishby 1253-1254; Zohar III 97a; I translate pieces of the text Tishby does not cover.
12. The Zohar also creates a ritual, *ushpizin*, in which each of the biblical characters associated with each of the seven lower *sefirot* is invited into the *sukkah* as a guest. Abraham represents the *sefirah* of *Chesed*; Isaac, *Din;* Jacob, *Tiferet*; Moses, *Netzach*; Aaron, *Hod*; Joseph, *Yesod*; and David, *Malchut*. See David Ariel. *The Mystic Quest* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1988) 156.

The *Ra'aya Meheimna* explains the Simchat Torah ritual of crowning the Torah scrolls as effecting unification as well. Shemini Atzeret is called, "Simchat Torah, and we crown the scroll of the Torah with its crown. The scroll of the Torah indicates *Tiferet*, and the *Shechinah* indicates the crown of glory (*ateret tiferet*)."[13] Here, mystics effect the unification of *Tiferet* and *Malchut* by crowning the Torah scroll with its *atarah*. Again, we have sexual imagery with the phallic scroll being enclosed or encircled by the crown.

Wolfson quotes a later mystical text which can help us further understand this kabbalistic notion of crowning. Moses Cordovero, a kabbalist of 16th-century Tsfat,[14] writes, "The [attribute of] *Malkhut* is called *'atarah* (crown). She is not called this except when she ascends to *Keter*, and there she is a crown on the head of her husband, the glorious crown (*ateret tiferet*). Thus she is a crown on the head of every righteous person, and she is the crown on the Torah scroll."[15] According to Wolfson, part of the kabbalistic process of redemption lies in the *sefirah* of *Malchut* ascending through the sefirotic realm until it attains "the status of the crown."[16] This crowning is depicted by "the crown on the head of the righteous, the crown of the husband, the crown on the Torah scroll, and the corona of the *membrum virile*."[17]

The act of crowning the scrolls takes on additional meaning in a text from *Tikkunei ha-Zohar*: "at the time of Simchat Torah a crown is put on the head of every

13. Tishby 1254. See also Zohar III 256b (Ra'aya Meheimna.)
14. Cordovero was a teacher of Isaac Luria. In his works, he attempts to systematize and summarize kabbalistic developments up until his time.
15. Wolfson 335-6; Quoting *Pardes Rimmonim*, 16, 34a, s.v. *'atarah*.
16. Wolfson 337.
17. Wolfson 337. Wolfson argues that when the *Shechinah* ascends to this position and crowns the masculine aspect, she "transforms her gender" and is "reintegrated into the masculine." Therefore, for the kabbalists, redemption occurs when "gender dichotomy" is overcome by the female assimilating into the male. This kabbalistic view of redemption is highly androcentric and thus, problematic.

righteous man in the world above, as it is written 'With the crown with which his mother crowned him on his marriage day, on the day when his heart rejoiced' (Song of Songs 3:11)."[18] The celebration of Simchat Torah, according to this text, effects a crowning of the righteous men in the sefirotic realm. This crowning is not only that of *Tiferet* by *Malchut* but a crowning of all of the male aspects with all of the female aspects in the sefirotic tree.

This text sees Simchat Torah as a propitious time for the intercourse between the male and female aspects of the godhead. Furthermore, when the mystics effect the unification in the divine realm, that process gives the mystics special access to God. *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* continues: "Similarly, Israel should be crowned with all on the day of Simchat Torah." The word "all" generally refers to the *sefirah* of *Yesod*. Therefore, Israel, meaning the circle of mystics who celebrate Simchat Torah properly, are rewarded with the crown of *Yesod*. Interestingly, the crowning of the feminine Israel by the male *Yesod* represents an inversion of the usual crowning of the male aspect by the female aspect.

Other texts emphasize the theme of divine intercourse more explicitly. In Zohar III 214b, we read that Shemini Atzeret-Simchat Torah is the actual day in which "the intercourse of the body takes place. . . the intercourse of all, so that all become one, and this is the perfection of all."[19] The phrase, "the intercourse of the body," refers to the entire sefirotic tree becoming unified.

Through these texts and their system of kabbalistic symbols, the Circle of the Zohar and the authors of later strata manage to add yet another layer to the richness of the

18. Tishby 1254. See also *Tikkunei ha-Zohar*, Tikkun 21, 56a-56b.
19. Tishby 1241.

holiday of Simchat Torah. Not only does Simchat Torah represent the culmination of the season of atonement, the end of the week-long festival of Sukkot, and the completion of the cycle of Torah reading, but Simchat Torah also represents the consummation of divine marriage. This consummation does not happen on its own, just because the day of Shemini Atzeret-Simchat Torah has arrived. Rather, these texts offer a system in which the mystics must, through proper observance of the festival, effect the consummation in the sefirotic realm themselves. This process of theurgy then results in bringing the mystics closer to God.

## Lurianic Kabbalah

### *Background*

In 16th-century Tsfat, Isaac Luria and his followers take kabbalistic interpretation and practice of Simchat Torah to a new level. They inherit the sefirotic system described in the Zohar, including the concept of Simchat Torah as effecting divine intercourse. In addition, Luria and his circle inherit various Simchat Torah practices, including *hakkafot* and dance. This innovative mystical community synthesizes what they have inherited and create a Simchat Torah celebration unparalleled in its richness of ritual and meaning.

Isaac Luria (1534-1572) traveled to Tsfat in late 1569 or early 1570 where he studied kabbalah with Moses Cordovero.[20] After Cordovero's death, Luria began to teach a circle of students, the most important of which became Chayyim Vital (1543-1620).[21] Because Luria did not write down his mystical thought, Vital and other students' records

20. Lawrence Fine. ed. and trans. *Safed Spirituality: Rules of Mystical Piety, the Beginning of Wisdom* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984) 61-62.
21. Fine, *Safed Spirituality* 61-62.

represent our only sources of Luria's teachings and records of his behavior on Simchat Torah.[22]

Luria's teachings can be described as an overlay through which he reinterpreted earlier kabbalistic ideas. According to the Zohar, Adam's sin caused disharmony in the sefirotic realm, which had as its effect the separation between the male and female aspects of God.[23] The Tsfat kabbalists saw this separation within the godhead in terms of the exile of the *Shechinah* from the rest of God, and they believed that their own sins caused this exile.[24] However, they also believed that when human beings behave properly, they bring temporary unity of God and allow the divine flow to reach down into the material world.[25] Thus, the Tsfat mystics took on the task of mending the breach in God through their own ascetic, devotional and contemplative behavior.[26] In the words of Lawrence Fine, "The ultimate goal of this community was a pragmatic one requiring mystical action -- nothing less than the return of all existence to its original spiritual condition, a state synonymous with the manifestation of the messianic age."[27]

*Luria's practice of Hakkafot*

As we saw above, the kabbalists of the Zohar took the Jewish ritual they had inherited and added a new layer of significance. In terms of Hoshana Rabbah and Simchat Torah, the Zohar saw the rituals of *hakkafot* and of crowning the Torah scrolls

22. Fine, *Safed Spirituality* 61-62.
23. Fine, *Safed Spirituality* 7.
24. Fine 8; It is not possible to explicate the whole of Lurianic myth in this study. For more detail, see: *Jewish Spirituality from the Sixteenth-Century Revival to the Present.* Ed. Arthur Green. (New York: Crossroad, 1987.)
25. Fine, *Safed Spirituality* 7.
26. Fine, *Safed Spirituality* 10.
27. Lawrence Fine, "The Contemplative Practice of Yihudim in Lurianic Kabbalah," *Jewish Spirituality from the Sixteenth-Century Revival to the Present,* ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1987) 65.

through the lens of the sefirotic system. According to Fine, the earlier kabbalists saw their innovations as uncovering the "deepest and truest level of meaning" already present in the traditional ritual.[28] The Tsfat kabbalists went farther than their predecessors, creating their own rituals altogether. One of these rituals was that of performing seven *hakkafot* around the Torah scrolls on Simchat Torah.

Luria's student, Chayyim Vital, is the first to describe the seven *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah:

> יום שמחת תורה. מה שנהגו להוציא הספרים מחוץ להיכל וגם להקיף עמהם בשחר ובמנחה ובערבית דמוצאי יום טוב, מנהג אמתי הוא, וכבר בס"ה [בספר הזוהר] . . .: ונוהגין ישראל למעבד עמה חדוה ואתקראת שמחת תורה ומעטרין לס"ת בכתר דיליה כו'. וראיתי למורי ז"ל [האר"י] נזהר מאד בדבר זה להקיף אחר הס"ת או לפניו או לאחריו ולרקד ולשורר לפניו בכל יכלתו בליל מוצאי י"ט אחר תפילת ערבית, והיה מקפיד מאד לעשות אז ז' הקפות שלמות של יום ש"ת, אבל בענין ההקפות שביום לא נמצאתי עמו ולא ראיתיו.[29]
>
> On Simchat Torah the custom is to take all of the scrolls outside of the synagogue and to circle with them at *shacharit*, *minchah*, and at *arvit* of *motz'ei yom tov* [sundown, as the holiday comes to a close.] It is an authentic custom and is already written about in the Zohar: "Israel's custom is to rejoice, and the holiday is called Simchat Torah, and they adorn the scroll

28. Fine, *Safed Spirituality* 16-17.
29. Yaari 266-7. Quoting Sha'ar Ha-Kavvanot l'Rav Chayyim Vital, Jerusalem תרל"ג daf 104.

> with a crown. . . ." I saw my teacher [Luria,] may his memory be a blessing, taking much care to circle the scrolls, either in front or behind them, and to dance and sing before them with all of his might on the night of *motz'ei yom tov* after *arvit*. He was very mindful [at *arvit*] to do the seven complete *hakkafot* of Simchat Torah day. However, regarding *hakkafot* during the day, I was not with him and did not see him.[30]

Here Vital witnesses Luria making seven *hakkafot* around the Torah scrolls during the evening service, as Simchat Torah comes to a close. Although, according to Vital's words, it was customary to perform *hakkafot* during the day, he doesn't witness Luria doing them. There may have been a dispute as to whether one should process in front or behind the scrolls, and Luria made sure to go *behind* them. That said, the seven *hakkafot* had clearly come to play a central role in Simchat Torah practice in Tsfat. Vital's description continues to describe how, after performing the *hakkafot* on *motz'ei* Simchat Torah, Luria would go out and find another synagogue that hadn't yet completed their *hakkafot* and join in with them.[31]

Not only did the seven *hakkafot* come to play an important role for Luria on Simchat Torah in Tsfat, but they also became part of his daily and Shabbat ritual. Vital gives the following account:

> I heard it said in the name of my master, of blessed memory, that when one enters the synagogue, he should bow in the direction of the Ark, after which he should recite the Psalm: 'May God be gracious to us and bless us' (Psalm 67) which is composed of seven verses. Corresponding to the number of verses in

30. My translation.
31. Yaari 267; See footnote 29.

> the Psalm he should circle the Reader's table, which stands in the middle of the synagogue, seven times. . . . On the Sabbath, however, there is no need to circle it more than once . . . . I observed, however, that he himself never actually practiced this upon entering the synagogue; perhaps this was due to the fact that he was not among the first ten to arrive there.[32]

According to Vital, Luria also prescribed that after going out to the fields to greet Shabbat, one should return home, wrap himself in a *tallit* and circle the dinner table.[33] The special loaves of bread for Shabbat would be laid out on the table in a way that corresponded to the show-bread on the altar in the Temple.

Luria's preoccupation with circling is fascinating. In many religious cultures, making circles connotes creating sacred space. Here, Luria advocates creating sacred space by imitating an ancient Temple ritual of circling the altar. He expresses an ideal -- Vital says that Luria never actually performed this ritual on weekdays -- that one should perform these *hakkafot* upon entering the synagogue before worship as well as upon entering one's home on Shabbat, thereby creating the sacred atmosphere associated with the Temple. The number seven also figures prominently in Luria's conception of circling before daily prayer and on Simchat Torah.

*Dance on Simchat Torah in 16th-century Tsfat*

Vital's account of Luria's behavior on Simchat Torah also highlights the custom of dancing. In fact, another text from 16th-century Tsfat describes dance on Simchat Torah but does not mention the practice of *hakkafot*. Moshe Mechir, the head of the

32. Fine, *Safed Spirituality* 72.
33. Fine, *Safed Spirituality* 74-5.

*yeshivah* at Ein Zeitim writes:

> They truly make joy for the Torah and take out all of the scrolls that are in the synagogue. They then make a *chuppah* for them and dance in front of them, all the while singing joyfully. They decorate the synagogue with beautiful adornments and crown the scrolls with all kinds of silver and gold decorations and dressings of silk and embroidery.[34]

This *chacham* may be describing the prevailing custom before Luria's arrival and influence in Tsfat. If this is so, then the Tsfat community was engaged in dance on Simchat Torah before they began to integrate the custom of seven *hakkafot* into their practice. We could speculate that dance was already indigenous to Eretz Yisrael as a component of Simchat Torah celebration. Alternatively, the exiles from Spain may have brought the custom with them to Tsfat.

As part of the attempt to spread their customs, Tsfat mystics would send ritual guides to Diaspora communities.[35] A ritual guide sent to a community in Morocco states, "There is a group which goes out on the night of Simhat Torah for the purpose of singing and dancing in the presence of the Torah scroll in every synagogue."[36] Regardless of where the custom originated, dance was clearly an important part of Simchat Torah for the kabbalists of Tsfat.

*Theosophical meaning of the hakkafot on Simchat Torah*

We do not learn the meaning of the seven *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah until two

34. Yaari 266, quoting *Sefer ha-Yom l'Rav Moshe n. Mechir.*
35. Fine *Safed Spirituality* 144.
36. Fine *Safed Spirituality* 144.

generations after Luria, in the 18th century. Chayyim Ha-Cohen of Aleppo, a student of Vital's, as well as the anonymous author of *Chemdat Yamim*[37] provide insight into the Lurianic interpretations of the custom. In his work, *Tur Barakat al Orach Chayim*, Chayyim Ha-Cohen provides the following explanation:

> והז' הקפות שעושים בשמחת תורה סביב התיבה, היינו כנגד ז' הקפות בהושנא רבה, שממשיכים למדה האחרונה [מלכות] הוא סוד התיבה, והעטרה שנותנים בס"ת היא העטרה אשת חיל עטרת בעלה. . כי התכלית היא להמשיך ברכות בעולם.[38]
>
> The seven *hakkafot* that we do on Simchat Torah around the *teivah* correspond to the seven *hakkafot* on Hoshana Rabbah, in that they continue [to bring the flow of blessing] to the final level of the godhead [*Malchut*] which is the secret of the *teivah* (*sod ha'teivah*). The adornment that we place on the Torah scroll is the adornment of the woman of valor, the crown of her husband. . . the purpose [of this custom] is to bring blessings down into the world.[39]

The work, *Chemdat Yamim*, also recounts that each *hakkafah* is directed to one of the seven lower *middot*, or *sefirot*: *Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netsach, Hod, Yesod* and *Malchut*.[40]

Chayim Ha-Cohen draws on zoharic interpretations of *hakkafot* and of crowning as he explains the purpose of these rituals on Simchat Torah. Just as, in the Zohar, the *hakkafot* on Hoshana Rabbah bring blessing into the world, these *hakkafot* on Simchat

37. According to EJ, s.v. "Hemdat Yamim," this work was first printed in Smyrna in 1731-32. This work passes on customs of the Lurianic kabbalists in Tsfat and reflects Sabbatean tendencies. Its authorship has been disputed over the centuries and is still unknown.
38. Yaari 268, quoting *Tur Barakat al Orach Chayim l'Rav Chayyim Ha-Cohen M'Aram-Tsubah.*
39. My translation.
40. Yaari 268, quoting *Chemdat Yamim*, ג"ח, Y'mei HaSukkot, Chapter 5.

Torah bring divine blessing down through the sefirotic tree into *Malchut* and eventually, into our world. Like the author of the Zohar,[41] this Lurianic mystic connects the Torah scroll itself to *Malchut*, referring to it as *sod ha'teivah,* the secret of the *teivah.*[42] In this text, the crowning of the Torah scroll also corresponds to the crowning of *Tiferet* by *Malchut*, with the phrases, "woman of valor" and "crown of her husband," referring to *Malchut*.

*Chemdat Yamim* draws on the zoharic concept of Simchat Torah representing the propitious moment for unifying the sefirotic realm. According to this work, the *hakkafot* have to take place at the right time in order to have the desired effect in the heavenly realm. When Simchat Torah fell on Shabbat and there was a need to keep services on Erev Shabbat/Simchat Torah to a manageable length, some communities would split the *hakkafot* between *shacharit* on Simchat Torah morning and *minchah* that afternoon, or *Shabbat B'reishit* the day after Simchat Torah. The following excerpt shows disapproval of this practice:

> . . .for a thing should be done at its appointed time. For this whole *tikkun*[43] is done on this day only because of what happens on this day in the heavens above . . . and I have already written that the seven *hakkafot* continue the process begun on Hoshana Rabbah, of moving the heavenly lights to the last *middah* [*Malchut*], which is the secret of the *teivah*. For this reason, it is not acceptable to do [the *hakkafot*] in an interrupted fashion.[44]

41. See footnote 10.
42. Here, I believe the *teivah* refers to the case which holds the Torah scroll.
43. A *tikkun,* meaning a "restoration" or "repair," is a mystical practice meant to aid in the goal of returning "all existence to its original spiritual condition," in the words of Lawrence Fine. ("The Contemplative Practice of Yihudim in Lurianic Kabbalah," 65.)
44. Yaari 280, quoting *Chemdat Yamim*. See footnote 35 for full reference.

The disapproval of splitting the *hakkafot* reflects the value that Lurianic kabbalah placed on performing the *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah. Through this practice, performed in the correct way and at the right time, the mystics would participate in the heavenly drama of unification. They understood the *hakkafot* as uniting the *Shechinah* with the rest of the sefirotic realm, from which she had been exiled.

**Dissemination of the practice beyond Eretz Yisrael**

Approximately 150 years elapsed before the custom of seven *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah spread to the Diaspora.[45] The aforementioned book, *Chemdat Yamim,* as well as the work, *Nagid U'Mitzvah*, by Yaakov Tsemach, were printed many times in the 18th century and were responsible for disseminating the custom.[46] Although the source of these two accounts, Vital's book, described the custom as happening on *motz'ei* Simchat Torah, Vital's original version wasn't printed until the mid-19th century.[47] Those who passed on traditions from *Chemdat Yamim* and *Nagid U'Mitzvah* were responsible for the fact that the custom caught on as one observed on the eve and morning of Simchat Torah.[48]

The custom of seven *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah spread to Europe, especially Italy, through emissaries from the Land of Israel. Our evidence comes from an 18th century pamphlet, *Seder Hakkafot*, which instructs the Sephardi community in Modena to

45. Yaari 268.
46. Yaari 268. *Nagid U'Mitzvah*, first printed in Amsterdam in 1712, was a collection of Luria's customs. Tsemach repeats, sometimes erroneously, accounts he had received from Chayyim Vital. See footnote 38 on *Chemdat Yamim*.
47. Yaari 268.
48. Yaari 268.

perform *hakkafot* on the eve and day of Simchat Torah.[49] One of these emissaries, Chayyim Yosef David Azulai (1724-1806) published his *Seder Hakkafot* in 1786 in Livorno, Italy. This pamphlet eventually came to be published in *siddurim, machzorim* and other collections of prayers. Thus, his *Seder Hakkafot* caught on and spread in Italy, to North Africa, and the Balkans, among other places.

**18th century Eastern Europe**

According to Yaari, during the course of the 18th century, the custom of *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah spread to the majority of Jewish communities in Eastern and Western Europe.[50] In Eastern Europe, both Chasidim and Mitnagdim adopted the custom,[51] and in some communities, new rituals developed in connection to the *hakkafot*.

Regarding the Mitnagdim, the biography of the Vilna Gaon gives the following account:

> . . . on Simchat Torah they would circle the *bimah* seven times; they wouldn't do fewer, but would add to them. . . and [the Gaon] would go before the scrolls very joyfully, and an intense love and wisdom would light up his face like a burning torch, and he would clap his hands and leap and twirl with all of his might before the Torah scrolls. . . .[52]

Clearly, *hakkafot* took a central role in the Simchat Torah celebration for the Mitnagdim. Not only did the Vilna Gaon perform *hakkafot*, but he also danced with joy.

As we might imagine, the Chasidim performed *hakkafot* and engaged in joyful

49. Yaari 269.
50. Yaari 275-276.
51. Yaari 275-276.
52. Yaari 290, quoting *Ma'aseh Rav, Hanhagot HaGra.*

dancing on Simchat Torah as well. Story after story from the Chasidic tradition recount the power of circular dancing, whether on Simchat Torah specifically or on other occasions.

A well-known story of the Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760) recounts how his students' dancing on Simchat Torah caused a ring of fire to glow in their circle.[53] Another tells of how the Baal Shem Tov's dancing with his students causes the moon to appear on a cloudy night, allowing them to perform the ritual of *kiddush l'vanah* (blessing of the moon.)[54] Other stories tell of the healing power of dance, in the human as well as the divine realm.

According to Michael Fishbane, Nachman of Bratslav (d.1810)[55] gives dance and bodily movement central roles in his kabbalistic belief system. Nachman talks of activating every limb of one's body while performing *mitzvot,* in order to activate "the entirety of joy, from head to heel."[56] For him, "the full activation of the entire body in holy actions is . . . a therapeutic of total joy, whereby the currents of divine energy enliven and integrate the human being in all 613 parts."[57] Furthermore, dance "draw[s] the *Shechinah* down to the earthly realm where it may alight upon the sick soul in healing union."[58]

Not only did these Eastern European communities adopt *hakkafot* and dance as their main expressions of joy on Simchat Torah, but they also developed new rituals in

53. Martin Buber. *Tales of the Hasidim, Book One: The Early Masters* Trans. Olga Marx. 2 vols. (New York: Schocken Books) 52-53.
54. Buber, *Book One* 53-54.
55. Nachman of Bratslav was the great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov.
56. Michael Fishbane. "To Jump for Joy: The Rites of Dance According to R. Nahman of Bratzlav" *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 6 (1997): 382, quoting *Likkutei Moharan.*
57. Fishbane 382.
58. Fishbane 375.

connection to *hakkafot*. For instance, in his *siddur*, Shneur Zalman of Lyadi (d. 1813) wrote of his community's custom of visiting other synagogues and joining in their *hakkafot*, after completing their own celebration.[59] Meir Shapira of Lublin would hold the *hakkafot* in the Beit Midrash of his yeshivah. There, he would add the aspect of rejoicing with the Oral Torah to the celebration with the Written Torah by having his students circle with printed volumes of the Talmud while the elders would circle with the Torah scrolls.[60] In some places, it also became part of the established custom to warn against not taking the *hakkafot* seriously enough. For example, Chayyim Elazar Shapira of Munkatch would announce before the *hakkafot*, ". . . for the sake of HaShem, guard yourselves from speaking of vain things during this holy, awesome time of *yichuda shalim* [complete unification], for this shall not be a rejoicing of licentious, riotous behavior, God forbid. . . ."[61]

As we can see from the Mitnagdic and Chasidic material, *hakkafot* and dance came to express the essence of rejoicing on Simchat Torah in 18th-century Eastern Europe.[62] In particular, the Chasidim saw *hakkafot* and dance through their lens of mystical belief. Taking the lead from Lurianic kabbalah, the Chasidim saw these physical, circular movements as having the capacity to mend the divine and human realms. Much more can be said about the Chasidic movement's approach to dance in general and on Simchat Torah in particular. For a list of relevant Chasidic stories, see Appendix #1.

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59. Yaari 275.
60. Yaari 304. Unfortunately, Yaari does not cite his source here.
61. Yaari 297, quoting *Darchei Chayyim v'Shalom, Minhagei R. Chayyim Elazar Shapira Av Beit Din Munkatch* ת"ש *siman* תש"ח-תש"ט.
62. Yaari 275-276.

**18th and 19th century Western Europe**

By the 18th century, the practice of *hakkafot* and dance on Simchat Torah had spread to most of Europe. However, some communities in Ashkenaz and Southern France did not adopt these customs.[63] Over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, some communities such as Amsterdam and Frankfurt Am Main did adopt *hakkafot*, under the influence of Eastern European custom, only to eventually abolish the practice.[64] In some congregations, the custom was adopted again after having previously been abolished.[65] We witness the struggle over *hakkafot* in the words of the prayer leader in Frankfurt Am Main in the mid-19th century:

> In Frankfurt and in all of the lands where the Ashkenazi custom is in practice, they do not make *hakkafot* with the Torah scrolls, neither at night nor in the day. But as of late, some have come to do *hakkafot* in the synagogue as they do in Poland [among the Chasidim.] However, this is not according to established law, of which our elders approved. For [the elders] say: What was is what will be, and that which was done is what should be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Not for the *chazan*, nor for the rabbi of a congregation that observes properly and follows the Torah, that they should change it. . . .[66]

This Ashkenazi Jewish leader observes that some congregations were adopting the practice of *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah, under the influence of Polish Chasidism. He

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63. Yaari 297
64. Yaari 276.
65. Yaari 276.
66. Yaari 276, quoting *Zalman Geiger, Divrei Kohelet, Minhagei Tefilot Kehilat HaKodesh Frankfurt Am Main,* Frankfurt תרכ"ב, 338.

clearly opposes the custom as a change from what they have always done in his community. Interestingly, as we noted in chapter 2 of this study, by the 14th century, some Ashkenazi communities had already adopted the practice of making at least one *hakkafah* on Simchat Torah. In addition, Isserles' gloss to the Shulchan Aruch includes the *hakkafah* in his description of how Ashkenazi communities observe the holiday. There are two possibilities for why this 19th-century prayer leader was railing against the practice as not authentically Ashkenazi. One possibility is that the Frankfurt community did not inherit the custom of *hakkafot*. More likely, this prayer leader was pretending that *hakkafot* were not authentically Ashkenazi as part of a polemic against Eastern European, Chasidic influence.

**Conclusion**

As the customs of Simchat Torah took shape during the rishonic period in Europe, the Zohar, published in the 13th century, added a theosophical layer to the meaning of the holiday and its rituals. In the Zohar, *hakkafot* attained the power to transform the sefirotic realm, bringing the male and female aspects of God together in holy unification. By the 16th century in Tsfat, the Lurianic kabbalists had begun the practice of seven *hakkafot* around the Torah scroll(s) on Simchat Torah. They understood the *hakkafot* as reuniting the *Shechinah* with the rest of the sefirotic realm, from which she had been exiled. Dance also reemerged as a central part of the Lurianic celebration of Simchat Torah. By the 18th century, these customs had spread to most communities in Europe, where Lurianic kabbalah had become part of normative Jewish practice and belief. However, some communities in Western Europe did not accept these customs.

In the 18th century, due to the effects of emancipation and the Enlightenment, many Jews had begun to join secular Western society as citizens and city-dwellers. The movement to reform Jewish life and synagogue practice was in full swing by the time of the rabbinical conferences of the mid 1800's in Brunswick and Frankfurt. As we shall see in the next chapter, the early reformers aimed to increase decorum in synagogue ritual and behavior. As a result, they were not interested in perpetuating the customs of *hakkafot* and dance on Simchat Torah.

# Chapter Four

# Simchat Torah in the Reform Movement

## Introduction

The process of reform began in Germany as Jews became citizens and became integrated into Western, secular society. This chapter traces the development of Simchat Torah practice in Reform synagogues from the time of early reform in Germany, through classical Reform in the United States, and ending with the movement to bring traditional forms back into the Reform synagogue in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

## Early Reform: Germany

### *Decorum*

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, newly emancipated German Jews began to introduce liturgical reforms into their synagogues. The early reformers, mostly laypeople, aimed to "eliminate all non-German elements, and to approach as closely as possible to the culture of the time."[1] Among the changes proposed and adopted during this time were the use of the organ, the use of vernacular in worship and in sermons, and the simplification and elimination of repetition in prayer.

In introducing these changes, the reformers transformed the traditional synagogue service to reflect the surrounding culture's values of dignity and decorum. For example,

1. Jakob J. Petuchowski, *Prayerbook Reform in Europe: The Liturgy of European Liberal and Reform Judaism* (New York: The World Union for Progressive Judaism, Ltd., 1968) 114-115, quoting Theodor Kroner's evaluation of his predecessor and main author of the *Stuttgart Regulation*, Dr. Joseph von Maier. For further discussion of the *Stuttgart Regulation*, see below.

in 1817, with the establishment of the Neue Israelitische Tempelverein in Hamburg, a group of community members sought to produce a prayer service which would be, in their words, ". . . dignified and well-organized. . . ."[2] According to Ismar Elbogen, this was the first time a congregation was created with the specific goal of reforming worship.[3] Meyer Israel Bresselau, an influential layperson and one of the founders of the Hamburg Temple, observed that young Jews, "exposed as they [were] to refreshingly new aesthetic and intellectual sensibilities," were "increasingly alienated from the cacophonous, unruly traditional service."[4] He argued that reforms in the spirit of decorum and dignity were "urgently needed to stem the tide of assimilation."[5]

In the early 19th century, liturgical reformers began to publish *Synagogenordnungen,* (Synagogue Regulations), which prescribed the order and proper behavior that the reformers required in their synagogues.[6] Often, local secular governments officially endorsed these directives, thus lending them some measure of authority.[7] Published in 1810, the "Proclamation concerning the Improvements of the Worship Service in the Synagogues of the Kingdom of Westphalia" served as the model for all *Synagogenordnungen* to follow.[8] During this time, Israel Jacobson, an influential reformer, was the major figure in the Westphalian Jewish establishment. The 1810 Proclamation included general rules concerning decorum, including: requiring clean

2. Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History,* Based on the original 1913 German edition and the 1972 Hebrew edition edited by Joseph Heinemann, et al. Trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1993) 302.
3. Elbogen 302.
4. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz eds., *The Jew in the Modern World,* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 175, note #1.
5. *The Jew in the Modern World* 175, note #1.
6. Petuchowski 105.
7. Petuchowski 106.
8. Petuchowski 106.

"decent" dress, banning children from services, and demanding that the cantor "enunciate every word of the prayers clearly. . . ."[9]

The preamble of the "Regulation of the Worship Service for the Synagogues of the Kingdom of Wuerttemburg," published in Stuttgart in 1838, asserts that the prayers as originally formulated were "most simple and dignified."[10] The document explains that, unfortunately, because of lack of authority, especially "in times of severe oppression. . . the order of prayers was augmented by many components which, happily, are no longer appropriate in our times."[11] The unfortunate "augmentations" probably refer to "kabbalistic accretions"[12] to the *siddur*, specifically those additions rooted in Lurianic mysticism.[13]

Typical of the practical implications of decorum is Paragraph 6 of the Stuttgart regulation which restricts physical movement during the worship service: "The synagogue should be entered with decorum and without noise. He who enters must immediately go to his seat, and remain in it as quietly as ever possible . . . .Any walking around or standing together within the synagogue is prohibited on pain of punishment."[14] Paragraph 8 reads: "Every conversation with one's neighbor, every noise, . . . as well as everything else which offends decency or disturbs the peace, are strictly prohibited."[15]

As we shall see, the reformers' goals of increasing decorum and purging

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9. Petuchowski 107-110.
10. Petuchowski 112.
11. Petuchowski 112.
12. The words "augmentation" and "accretion" are loaded terms. Reformers used these terms to imply "extra" or "not needed" material, when they really were referring to material that did not work with their rationalist worldview. For instance, they did not purge Maimonides from the prayerbook, even though he too is an "accretion." However, they would certainly call kabbalistic elements, "augmentations."
13. Elbogen 298.
14. Petuchowski 113.
15. Petuchowski 114.

kabbalistic content have clear implications for Simchat Torah practice. For them, *hakkafot* symbolized the tendencies of traditional Jewish worship toward unruly behavior as well as mystical beliefs. Hence, they deemed such practices inappropriate for the modern synagogue.

*Simchat Torah*

Jakob Petuchowski remarks, "While the pre-Emancipation synagogue was not generally marked by too much decorum, there were two occasions in the year when there was even less decorum than usual: Purim and Rejoicing in the Law [Simchat Torah.]"[16] Two paragraphs from the 1810 Westphalia Regulation try to remove the apparent causes of such disturbances. Paragraph 40 reads, "The procession with the Torah on the eve of the festival of Rejoicing in the Law, which has been customary in some congregations, must no longer take place. Nor must there be a reading from the Torah on that night."[17] Paragraph 42 outlaws the "beating of Haman" on Purim as well as disruption of the reading of the *megillah*.[18] According to the document, the *megillah* "should be read decently and quietly."[19] Thus, Purim and Simchat Torah fell into the same category of festivals, the practices of which tended towards the unruly and indecorous. Regarding both festivals, the reformers objected to disruptive noise and physical movement.

In fact, any ritual which may have included physical movement, especially leaving one's seat, was banned. Paragraph 9 of the 1838 Stuttgart Regulation listed the following among practices deemed "offensive to the decorum and to the dignity of the

16. Petuchowski 111.
17. Petuchowski 110.
18. Petuchowski 107-110.
19. Petuchowski 107-110.

worship" and therefore "no longer permitted in the synagogue":

(a) The kissing of the curtain on entering the synagogue or during the service;

(b) leaving on's seat in order to kiss the Scroll of the Law;

(c) the knocking during the reading of the Book of Esther on the feast of Purim;

(d) the *malkoth*-bearing (self-flagellation) on the Eve of the Day of Atonement;

(e) the noisy beating of the *hoshanoth* on the seventh day of Tabernacles;

(f) sitting on the floor on the fast of the Ninth of Ab;

(g) removing shoes and boots in the synagogue on that day;

(h) the procession with the Torah, which is still practiced in some localities, on the eve of Rejoicing in the Law;

(i) the procession of the children with flags and candles on that festival;

(j) the distribution of food and drink in the synagogue on that festival in localities where it is still taking place.[20]

During the time that David Einhorn[21] was "chief rabbi" of the region, the "Regulations for the Principality of Birkenfeld" (1843), banned such behaviors as "the loud kissing of the *tzitztith*" and "the swaying to and fro during prayer."[22] In the same year, regulations were published in Mecklenburg-Schwerin, where Samuel Holdheim served as chief rabbi.[23] This document also prohibited "the procession of children with flags and candles on the feast of Rejoicing in the Law, where that is still customary."[24] The *Synagogenordnung* in Mayence appeared along with its prayerbook in 1853. Although it

20. Petuchowski 114.
21. Einhorn came to be a major force in Reform Judaism in the USA.
22. Petuchowski 116, quoting Paragraph 6.
23. Petuchowski 117.
24. Petuchowski 118.

does not mention Simchat Torah specifically, it prohibits leaving one's seat, "when the Torah is being taken out of the Ark or returned thither."[25]

These regulations all reflect discomfort with any ritual which required leaving one's seat and engaging in a physical act. I would speculate that these acts were banned, not only because they were indecorous, but also because the reformers saw many of them as superstitious, mystical, primitive, or foreign. These lists often place more restrictions on Simchat Torah practice than any other festival or ritual act. We might conclude that, for the early reformers, this holiday exemplified everything that was wrong with the path Jewish worship had taken until their time. Because Simchat Torah included physical movement, participation of children, mystical overtones, and riotous celebration, the reformers focused their restrictions on this festival all the more. We might ask then, if the restrictions resulted in curbing the feeling of *simchah* (rejoicing) on Simchat Torah, or if a new mode of expressing joy accompanied the new decorous mood. We will revisit this question as we continue to explore the Reform movement's treatment of Simchat Torah.

While laypeople spearheaded the earliest reforms, by the mid-19th century, rabbis began to take the lead. A series of rabbinical conferences demonstrated this shift in activity from the lay community to the rabbis. The first conferences in Brunswick (1844) and Frankfurt (1845) concerned themselves specifically with liturgical reform. At the 1845 rabbinical conference in Frankfurt, the commission on reform of liturgy reported that the "failings of the synagogue service" were "the most important reasons for the lack of participation in religious life."[26]

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25. Petuchowski 119-120.
26. Elbogen 312, quoting *Protokolle und Aktenstucke der zweiten Rabbiner-Versammlung abgehalten zu Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt: E. Ullman, 1845.)

At this second conference in Frankfurt, the rabbis agreed by majority vote to introduce the triennial cycle of Torah reading as well as to do away with the second days of festivals.[27] According to Elbogen, this meant that Simchat Torah would only be celebrated every three years.[28] However, the triennial cycle which many reform communities eventually adopted did not have such an effect on the calendar. Rather, in their triennial system, a community would read one third of each Torah portion every week, keeping them on the same schedule as the rest of the Jewish world. Additionally, while these German rabbis discussed liturgical and theological issues which continued to concern reformers for generations to come, the resolutions of the conferences did not have a significant effect upon synagogue practice at the time. Elbogen himself points out, "Nowhere was it even possible to speak of putting the resolutions of the rabbinical conferences into effect; even where the government supported the reformers and favored the introduction of synagogue constitutions."[29] Therefore, we cannot know for sure if German reform synagogues actually initiated the rabbinic proposals. We do know that Abraham Geiger's 1854 prayerbook which did not generally follow the directives of the rabbinical conferences did introduce the triennial cycle of Torah reading.[30] But exactly what German reform communities actually did with Simchat Torah is not altogether clear.

In his memoir, Caesar Seligmann (1860-1950), a leading German Liberal rabbi reviews suggestions and "theses" he brought before for the "Commission of the Department of Worship" of the Main Synagogue in Frankfurt in 1903. In their

27. Elbogen 314.
28. Elbogen 313.
29. Elbogen 317.
30. Elbogen 317-318.

discussions, the commission raises the question of whether to continue celebrating the second day of festivals, and "For the time being, no decision was adopted concerning the service of the second days of the three historical festivals. . . ." In the meantime, the commission decided to create a "special festive liturgy. . ." for Simchat Torah and to designate "a special Torah portion and Haftarah" for that day. Many years later, in 1929, Seligmann, Elbogen and Vogelstein were instrumental in developing a uniform liturgy for German Liberal Judaism. Their *Einheitsgebetbuch* or, *Union Prayer Book*, included "a new solemn service for the Eve of Hanukkah, Purim, and the Ninth of Ab" as well as a special service for the "*Simhath Torah* celebration."

Early German reformers clearly considered Simchat Torah significant enough to create special liturgies for the day. As we shall see in our discussion of Simchat Torah in the United States, early Reform's grassroots emphasis on decorum influences Simchat Torah practice much more than resolutions made at rabbinical conferences.

## Early Reform: USA

### *Decorum*

As we turn our attention to the early Reform movement in the United States, we will find the laypeople and rabbis concerned with the same basic issues as the German reformers. Elbogen explains that the Reform movement, wherever it arose, had common roots in the laypeople and rabbinic leadership wanting to restore, "Quiet and order, dignity and reverence in worship. . . ."[31] Regarding liturgy, reformers everywhere wanted to shorten worship services and reduce repetition.[32] As Jews became more educated and

31. Elbogen 325.
32. Elbogen 325.

Westernized, they wanted to have sermons and Torah readings in the vernacular in order to better understand the message and the meaning of what they were hearing.[33] All of the above changes relate to the aesthetics and outer form of the service. Theologically based changes to the liturgy, such as eliminating references to resurrection of the dead or a personal messiah were made by the intellectual elite and on the whole were not viewed with interest by the laity.[34]

In his article, "The Reform Synagogue," Leon Jick summarizes the early reforms in American synagogues as mostly concerned with decorum.[35] Various synagogues in the 1840s, such as Rodeph Sholom and Knesset Israel, both of Philadelphia, and Bnai Jeshurun in Cincinnati passed proposals to "prevent disorder" and to make sure that congregants would "enter the synagogue 'with decency and without noise.'"[36] After the Civil War, "economic advance, accelerating acculturation, and pervasive optimism nourished the rising tide of reform that suffused the American synagogue."[37] By the 1880s, the synagogue came to be called a "temple."[38] At the dedication of the Plum Street Synagogue in Cincinnati, Isaac Mayer Wise spoke of the difference between the two terms. He asserted that prayer in the "temple" was to be "conducted in gladness and not in perpetual mourning."[39] I imagine that Wise formulated his concept of gladness in contrast to the mourning that he perceived in traditional European Judaism. We should not interpret the gladness he was striving for in American Judaism as the joyful ecstasy or

33. Elbogen 326.
34. Elbogen 326.
35. Leon A. Jick, "The Reform Synagogue." *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed.* ed. Jack Wertheimer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 87.
36. Jick 87.
37. Jick 88.
38. Jick 89.
39. Jick 89.

release in the Chasidic world. Rather, he believed that the new American temple would express joy through its atmosphere of dignity and decorum, stateliness and pomp, quiet and order.

According to Jick, by the late 1880s, "the service as well as the general ambience of the Reform temple had been substantially Protestantized,"[40] meaning that rituals that may have seemed exotic in a Protestant context, such as the pageantry around the Torah service, were simplified or done away with altogether. By this time, a short selection of the Torah portion was read as opposed to chanted.[41] The tradition of calling congregants up to recite blessings before and after the Torah reading was done away with.[42] Also, the prayers usually offered during the Torah reading, such as *Mi Shebeirach*, were abolished.[43] As we shall see below in the NAORRR study, Reform synagogues did not process with the Torah scroll before or after the Torah reading. In effect, these changes turned the Torah service into a "scriptural reading" that wouldn't have sounded or looked foreign to an American Protestant visitor.

As we saw with early German Reform, early American reforms focused mostly on issues of decorum. An analysis of the early Reform movement prayerbooks as well as a study of retired Reform rabbis will demonstrate how decorum played out in the Simchat Torah liturgy from the time of the first *Union Prayer Book* in 1896 through today.

*Simchat Torah: Siddur Analysis*

In 1889, Isaac Meyer Wise convened a group of Hebrew Union College (HUC)

40. Jick 92.
41. Jick 92.
42. Jick 92.
43. Jick 92.

graduates and established the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR).[44] One of the first projects of the CCAR was to create a uniform prayer book for the Reform movement.[45] The *Union Prayer Book* was published in 1896 and immediately caught on. By 1907 over 200 congregations had adopted it.[46] In fact, the earliest edition of the UPB was published in 1892, by Rabbi Isaac Moses of Chicago. This first version was rejected and then reworked into a more "classically Reform" statement of identity which was published to wide acclaim in 1896.

Close examination of the 1892 edition of the *Union Prayer Book* shows no specific Simchat Torah liturgy. The "Morning Service for Festivals" includes a very simple liturgy for removing the Torah scroll from the ark, reading from the Torah and Prophets, and then returning the scroll.[47] The prayerbook then lists "Sermon" and "Hymn" and the Psalms of *Hallel* appears on the next page.[48] No choreographic directions appear in this liturgy, and there are no references to *hakkafot* of any kind.

The 1896 edition of Einhorn's *Olat Tamid* provides slightly more material for Simchat Torah. The "Service for the Morning of Pesah, Shabhuoth, Sukkoth, Sabbath Hanukkah" includes the Torah and Haftarah readings for Simchat Torah (Deuteronomy 34 and Joshua 1) in a list with all of the other festival readings.[49] The top of page 111 also reads, "On Sim'hath-Torah: After the reading of the lesson, Psalm 150 is chanted by the choir:" Choreographic notes direct the congregation to stand while the Torah scroll is taken from the ark. The text also designates the "Minister" as the person who says the

44. Jick 92.
45. Jick 92.
46. Jick 92.
47. UPB 1892, 115.
48. UPB 1892, 117-119.
49. *Olat Tamid* 1896, 108-110.

blessings over the Torah readings.[50] Again, there are no *hakkafot* mentioned in this prayerbook.

The 1924 version of UPB closely resembles *Olat Tamid's* festival service in its "Morning Service for Festivals." Deuteronomy 34 and Joshua 1 are listed as the scriptural readings for Shemini Atzeret, signaling the Reform movement's decision not to celebrate the second day of holidays.[51] After the scriptural readings, an English prayer for the "Feast of Conclusion" ends with a petition for rain and dew.[52] As in *Olat Tamid*, the "Minister" is designated as the person who pronounces the blessings over the Torah readings. Choreographic notes direct the congregation to rise for the removal of the Torah scroll and for its return to the ark. No *hakkafot* are mentioned.

Prayerbooks cannot tell us everything about how a particular festival was celebrated in the synagogue. However, these early American Reform prayerbooks do demonstrate the emphasis placed on decorum, in their restriction of the Torah blessings to the "Minister" (rabbi) and in their scarcity of choreography. We can also infer from the fact that later Reform prayerbooks have more "stage directions," that *hakkafot* and physical movement were just then being introduced after a long time absence from earlier Reform practice. We will see more evidence below, from the recollections of retired Reform rabbis, that *hakkafot* were not common Simchat Torah practices until the 1960s and 70s.

A new edition of the UPB was published in the early 1940s, reflecting many changes that had taken place in the Reform movement in the 1930s and 40s. Major shifts

50. *Olat Tamid* 1896, 109.
51. UPB 1939, 265-267.
52. UPB 1939, 268-269.

in the 1937 CCAR Columbus Platform included support for Zionism, by affirming the "obligation of all Jewry to aid in the upbuilding of Palestine as a Jewish homeland."[53] The new UPB was less bold: it did not diverge greatly from the original version, although what changes there were moved "in the direction of restored traditional practices, increased use of Hebrew, and away from the extreme assimilationism of earlier reform."[54]

The 1942 UPB Simchat Torah liturgy, especially its extensive choreographic notes, reflects these changes. The Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah service includes several major parts, including *Hallel*, scriptural readings, and the consecration of religious school students.[55] The following are excerpts from the choreographic directions for the scriptural readings and the consecration ceremony:

> The scrolls are taken from the Ark by the president or other officer of the congregation and handed to the rabbi. The rabbi handing the Torah to the three generations recites these verses: *Ki Mitzion, Baruch shenatan,* . . .in Hebrew and English. Then all face congregation and say *Sh'ma Yisrael*. . .Then they proceed with the *Hakofos*, one of more circuits of the Temple, in procession, the choir singing: *Ana Adonai*. . . .When all have returned to the platform which they reascend, two of the scrolls are taken to the pulpit and opened, one at *Vezos Hab'rocho* and the other at *Bereshis*. . . .The rabbi recites the *B'rocho* [blessing] and reads from the Scroll. After the reading of the two passages from the Scroll and their translations and the *Haftarah* (Joshua I) and while the fathers and sons

53. Jick 101.
54. Jick 101.
55. The Reform movement created the Consecration ritual as a way to mark the beginning of a child's formal religious education. This study will not extensively analyze this ritual. However, we will see that the presence of children plays an important role in the development of Reform Simchat Torah practice.

> remain on the pulpit, the organ begins its processional. The consecrants enter, carrying flowers. They ascend the pulpit and with the rabbi repeat: *Sh'ma Yisroel*,. . . The rabbi then blesses the consecrants. . . The Scrolls are given back to the rabbi one by one and placed within the Ark.[56]

As we can see, this prayerbook reintroduces the practice of *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah for Reform temples. Several factors explain the reappearance of *hakkafot* in this edition of UPB. First of all, as Leon Jick observed, this edition generally reflected a shift in the Reform movement back to more traditional forms of practice. Also, the emergence of the consecration ceremony may have opened up the possibility of incorporating more physical movement into the service. Since the children were processing with flowers, why not process with the Torah scroll? Moreover, the involvement of children in ritual already represented new flexibility in the decorum standards. Having broken the rule of excluding children, it became easier to bend the rule against performing *hakkafot*. We cannot conclude, however, that because the printed choreography includes *hakkafot*, congregations were necessarily doing them. As we shall see below in the study of retired Reform rabbis, *hakkafot* did not become widespread in Reform synagogues until many decades later than the 1942 UPB.

**Study of Retired Reform Rabbis: Method**

This study was undertaken personally at the annual conference of the National Organization of Retired Reform Rabbis (NAORRR) in San Diego, CA on January 12th and 13th, 2003. I collected my information through written surveys as well as in-person

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56. UPB 1942, 259-263.

interviews. The rabbis in the study are all male, and they range in age from their late fifties to their eighties, with some in their nineties. I also had the opportunity to hear from a few spouses (wives.) While my study at NAORRR was not scientific and my sample was small (14 surveys were returned to me, and I conducted 17 interviews), this field research did provide me with consistent information from which I was able to extrapolate trends in Simchat Torah practice from the 1940s through the present. It also gave me a good sampling of the variety of practice that existed in the past and continues today.

I identified four groups of rabbis in this study:

- One group consisted of men who had grown up in American classical Reform[57] synagogues and who continued in the classical Reform tradition throughout their rabbinates.
- A second group of rabbis came from traditional backgrounds in Europe or the United States. Often, they had taken pulpits that were entrenched in classical Reform, but arrived there with the intention of introducing more tradition.
- The third group consisted of rabbis who took pulpits that operated in the classical Reform model, but as times changed and the Reform movement adopted more tradition, they brought more traditional forms into their synagogues. However, this group did not necessarily see bringing back more tradition as one of their goals.
- The fourth group were rabbis who started their own synagogues, usually establishing a less classical Reform mode from the start.

57. For the rabbis in this study, the term "classical Reform" refers to a decorous aesthetic with little traditional ritual and most prayers in the vernacular.

Because my study focused on a traditionalism, (the practice of *hakkafot*), I probably attracted a skewed sample of rabbis with a preference for tradition to my interviews and surveys. However, some staunch classical Reformers did make it a point to speak with me, and thus provided balance to the study.

I also identified three categories among congregations:

- The first category had been firmly established as German congregations in the late 19th or early 20th century and were equally firmly rooted in classical Reform practice. This pattern had often continued well into the 1960s and 70s, and even into the 1990s.
- In other classical Reform synagogues, (my second category), aesthetic and ritual values evolved over the years, slowly but surely integrating traditions like *hakkafot*, as early as the late 50s, early 60s. In some of these places, the rabbi initiated the change. In other places, it was the congregants who first expressed interest in change and had to encourage the rabbi to adopt more tradition.
- The third category did not come from strong classical Reform roots at all. Often, these synagogues were established by young, suburban families, in the late 1950s, early 60s. In these places, the rabbis usually had an easier time introducing more traditional forms, such as *hakkafot*.

The complete listing of survey questions is contained in Appendix #2. The most important ones are:

-Describe the worship styles in the congregations in which you worked.

- Did you do a *hakafah* with the Torah scroll during a regular Shabbat

service? Why or why not?

- Did you do *hakafot* with the Torah scrolls on Simchat Torah? Why or why not?

- In some synagogues, it has become common to dance with the scrolls, or at least to simulate dancing by not just carrying them formally in a procession. Did anyone dance in the synagogue on Simchat Torah? If so, describe the dancing.

My goal in asking these questions was to first get a sense of the liturgical atmosphere in the Reform synagogue, specifically when the Torah scroll was involved, and then to learn about Simchat Torah practice within that context.

**Study of Retired Reform Rabbis: Findings**

*Hakkafot*

*Hakkafot* with the Torah scroll(s) had never been part of classical Reform practice, even on a regular Shabbat service, let alone on Simchat Torah with its extra dimensions of "indecorous" celebration, and I heard several reasons for not doing them. One reason was that *hakkafot* represented a primitive ritual. Rabbi C., rabbi emeritus of Congregation C. in Northern California[58], came to his congregation in the mid 1960s, with the intention of creating a *heimisch* (homey, warm), traditional Jewish atmosphere. As soon as he arrived, he instituted the practice of making a *hakkafah* with the Torah scroll on Shabbat, before the Torah reading. He tells the following story:

I had a big problem. . . .The only Torah we had in 1966 was donated by Dr. and

58. I include the names of rabbis who testify as observers to what motivated people in general. I take them out if they testify to specific events in their congregations.

> Mrs. S. . . .Both of them were raised in [a classical Reform Temple in the Midwest.] The Torah had never been taken out [for *hakkafot*] until I got there. And of course, when I took the Torah out on the first Shabbat, I got a strict letter saying, "This Torah was donated by us. We have never done this before, and we are opposed to this. . . . Its like we're going back to some kind of Jewish voodoo. . . ." I said, I'm sorry, but this is the way it's going to be, whether you like it or not. . . .The original Torah donors are still my friends. They just didn't understand that what was done in [their midwestern home] 30 years ago is not necessarily *Torah mi Sinai* [revealed at Sinai].

For these congregants, the *hakkafah* represented a superstitious or even idolatrous ritual. However, Rabbi C. was able to integrate it into the synagogue custom, since most of the congregants were not rooted in classical Reform. Rabbi S. worked as an assistant rabbi at Temple S. in Chicago in the late 1960s. According to him, the senior rabbi, Rabbi B., would have called "parading around a sanctuary with the scrolls" a "primitive custom."

Others resisted *hakkafot* because, in their minds, this ritual represented Orthodox Judaism. When Robert S. introduced a *hakkafah* on Shabbat at his student pulpit in 1965, he heard comments like, "I didn't know we did those Orthodox customs in a Reform congregation! Are we going to start doing that every week? Are we headed back towards Orthodoxy?" Similarly, when Rabbi A. introduced *hakkafot* in a regular Shabbat service, he remembers someone asking if he was trying to make their temple into an Orthodox *schul*. My father, Rabbi Irwin Goldenberg,[59] suggests that calling a ritual "too Orthodox" was the only way congregants could explain the problem they had with it. In his opinion,

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59. Interview, January 14, 2003.

they probably were objecting more out of a general discomfort with change. At base, this resistance to *hakkafot* stemmed from congregants' identities and comfort as Reform Jews. Reform Jews did not engage in what looks like "primitive" or "Orthodox" ritual.

Rabbi J., rabbi emeritus of Congregation K. in NY, had a different take on the lack of *hakkafot* in classical Reform synagogues. Rabbi J. served as senior rabbi from 1962 through 1991, and during the course of his time there, he did not do a *hakkafah* with the Torah on Shabbat. His successors have restored this custom. According to J., this was "prevailing practice in Reform synagogues. It was not a rejection of [*hakkafot.*] It was never considered! I know that most Reform congregations from the 60s through the 80s did not have *hakkafot* [during a Shabbat Torah service]. There was nothing ideological about it." Several other rabbis agreed. Those who had grown up in classical Reform temples had never seen *hakkafot* before. Moreover, the Reform seminaries did not train them to do *hakkafot*, which were simply not part of Reform practice.

Two rabbis added a theological layer to the reason for not having *hakkafot* in classical Reform congregations. Rabbi G., who has served Temple G. in PA since 1974, remembers "coming down from the pulpit to have a discussion on a Friday night, during the service." Afterwards, a congregant approached him and said, "Rabbi, I'd rather you stayed up on the pulpit." According to G., the classical Reform ritual mode separated the pulpit from the pew, and saw a sense of spirituality in that separation. People identified worship more as an individual experience, not a communal one. Bringing the Torah into the community is a communal act, while sitting in the pew and hearing the Torah read is more personal. "[The former is] more like Sinai," in which the pulpit is the mountain. The congregants are "standing around the mountain and you don't touch that mountain!

It's holy!"

Rabbi A. told a particularly illustrative story. As he was making the *hakkafah* on Yom Kippur, he walked by a row of people, when everyone in the row stepped forward to touch the Torah, except for one man who shrank backwards. Many months later, the man told him that he had stepped back because he had felt "unworthy." A. believes that, for many people, contact with the holy is a frightening experience. Rabbis often forget the awesomeness of ritual, while congregants often still feel the power of sacred objects and sacred space. Classical Reform Judaism did not tolerate *hakkafot*, which bring congregants into direct contact with the holy. Rather, the classical Reform mode maintained separation between the sacred object of the Torah, the sacred space of the pulpit, and the realm of the congregation. As Rabbi Stanley Dreyfus explained, in the classical Reform synagogue, the rabbi's task was to preserve a sense of "otherness" in worship and ritual.

*Hakkafot on Simchat Torah*

If circling with the Torah scroll in the congregation on Shabbat contravened the spirituality of classical Reform decorum, all the more so did *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah contradict those values. The highly participatory and sometimes rowdy and chaotic nature of *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah did not lend itself well to the classical Reform atmosphere. Generally, Reform synagogues did not practice this ritual until the Reform movement was in the midst of major ideological and aesthetic change, in the late 1960s and 70s.

As we saw above in the analysis of early Reform prayerbooks, *hakkafot* on

Simchat Torah went unmentioned in the *Union Prayer Book* until its 1942 edition, where they became part of the consecration service. And my findings show that *hakkafot* were not common in classical Reform synagogues until the late 1960s, early 1970s, with the introduction of the consecration ceremony for children entering religious school.

In many classical Reform synagogues, through the 1960s, Simchat Torah was celebrated either minimally or not at all, as in Temple S. in Chicago. Rabbi L. spoke of his congregation in New England, which also had no *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah in the 1960s. They would read the end of Deuteronomy and the beginning of Genesis, but nothing beyond that. L. (and some others) also pointed out the limitations of space in older congregations which had pews with only one center aisle, an architectural design that made *hakkafot* difficult. The classical Reform synagogue in the United States was simply not spatially designed for physical movement during the course of a service. Referring to his experience at a large classical congregation in the South, Rabbi G. recalled also the limitations of a high pulpit, from which it would have been difficult to descend for *hakkafot*. His experience at this congregation in the 1970s was similar to others already mentioned. "Nothing much happened" on Simchat Torah.

Rabbi B., who served Temple B. in NY, reported that his congregation did nothing on Simchat Torah until 1971, when he introduced the holiday. In fact, until that time, Purim was just an assembly in the social hall, "because it was too undignified to do in the sanctuary." As time went on, Simchat Torah "gradually developed into a spirited celebration, with music, singing and *hakkafot*."

However, some Reform synagogues had introduced *hakkafot* before the 1970s. These congregations were usually on the right-wing of the Reform movement, or their

rabbis came from traditional backgrounds and wanted to bring more tradition into the congregation. For instance, Rabbi H. remembers *hakkafot* to the chanting of *Ana Adonai, Hoshia na* in the late 1940s, early 50s at Temple H. in New York City. At that point, the Temple was "a little right of center," he recalls. Rabbi P. came to Temple P. in the Southwest in 1955 and immediately introduced *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah. Everyone came to see the Reform rabbi "dancing with the Torah. . . because their image of Reform was Unitarianism, without ritual and tradition," and he made Simchat Torah "a very joyous occasion." P. described himself as "a Chasid at heart," saying that "Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel had a profound influence" on him.

Rabbi M. served a succession of small pulpits in the South and Midwest from 1959 until the present. In his experience, already in 1959, *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah were common in all of the places where he worked., starting in 1959. Over the years the *hakkafot* evolved from more decorous processions in the 1950s and 60s into more "obviously and openly joyful" in the past 10-15 years. Another rabbi pointed out that for a Reform congregation which was the only synagogue in town, it may have been more likely to incorporate more traditional forms, such as *hakkafot*, in order to accommodate a laity of diverse backgrounds. This may have been the case for some of M.'s congregations.

According to Rabbi D., many classical Reform synagogues had down-played the festivals in general, to the point where there wasn't much attendance at these services. He was unhappy that Temple D. in NY, where he served from 1965 to 1979, had been neglecting Simchat Torah, and he tried to "resurrect the practice." His wife told the story of the year he introduced *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah. Only two or three male officers of

the congregation were allowed to take out the scrolls, and they made one circuit with them. She said, "The roof almost caved in," this was such a new concept. The next year, D. convinced the leadership to allow a woman from the Temple board to participate in the *hakkafot*. From that time on, the participation increased, and today everyone is involved: men, women and children.

Leon Jick quotes a 1971 survey which showed a huge increase from the 30s and 50s in Jewish family observance of rituals on Passover, Hannukah and Shabbat. Using the example of Congregation Bnai Jehuda of Kansas City as typical, Jick gives examples of changes in the synagogue: "In 1953, the *shofar* replaced the trumpet in the Rosh Hashanah service after a sixty-year absence. Six years later [1959] the chanting of *Kiddush* and the *Hakafot* [with the Torah scrolls on Simchat Torah] were restored, and a cantor was hired."[60] My study concurs. It dates the return of *hakkafot* in Reform practice to the late 60s, early 70s.

The practice of consecrating religious school children breathed new life into Simchat Torah, and by the 1970's, consecration was a widespread practice. Rabbi H. spoke of people's "yearning for restoration" of meaningful ritual. In the classical Reform temples where he served, he saw part of his mission as bringing in "elements of tradition," and in 1957, he merged Simchat Torah and consecration as "a means to an end." The real goal was to draw congregants into the synagogue for Simchat Torah. This merging brought about the desired effect, and he says that now the synagogue "could probably let consecration go, because huge number come on Simchat Torah now."

The majority of the rabbis in this study introduced Simchat Torah to their

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60. Jick 104.

congregations as a family service with consecration. Accounts of the Simchat Torah practice at these family services shared several elements. First of all, there was agreement among those surveyed that the presence of children allowed for a less decorous atmosphere and opened the congregation up to the idea of *hakkafot*. Usually, the rabbi and cantor (if there was one) would lead, carrying the Torah scrolls, and the consecrants would follow, carrying their miniature scrolls. Many of the rabbis shared the experience of initially having difficulty involving adults in the *hakkafot*. According to Rabbi J. "We urged the parents to join the *hakkafot*, but they'd send their kids out." However, over the years, more adults participated with their children. Some rabbis would assign different groups in the synagogue community to different *hakkafot*, in order to give everyone a chance to hold the Torah. Groups included the youth group, religious school teachers, Temple board members, Sisterhood, Brotherhood, and the list goes on.

Several rabbis agreed that they didn't want Simchat Torah to become a "children's holiday" or a "children's service." Many of these rabbis introduced Simchat Torah as a consecration service and found that over the years, adults began to participate more equally with the children. Rabbi P. of Temple P. in NJ, found that so many "young families" would come for Simchat Torah that the "regulars. . . the older ones who were there most Friday nights" wouldn't come because of the noise and chaos.

*Dance*

The rabbis were about equally split on their recollection spontaneous dancing on Simchat Torah. Rabbi C. described doing *hakkafot* in the sanctuary and then moving into the social for dancing with a klezmer band. Rabbi F. spoke of dancing breaking out

during the *hakkafot* once or twice over the years. Rabbi I., who came from a traditional background, served a suburban congregation that had no classical Reform roots. He spoke of "getting a *horah* going on the *bimah* during the *hakkafot*." Rabbi A. described how his wife and others would "open up the overflow area and spontaneously dance in a circle around the Torah" while he stayed on the *bimah* and directed traffic. He said that "more women and kids would dance; the men didn't seem too interested." After the *hakkafot*, Rabbi H. would have dance leaders take the congregants into the social hall for dancing, which would "go on and on." Rabbi G. now brings the *hakkafot* into the social hall where he teaches the congregation some dance steps and leads dancing around the Torah scrolls.

Most of the accounts of dancing share the element of someone taking the initiative to dance, whether the rabbi, the rabbi's spouse, the cantor, or designated dance leaders. These accounts also reflect the need for live music, whether a klezmer band, spirited singing led by the cantor or rabbi, or a creative organist who pulls out all the stops. Leadership is the key. My study showed that rabbis and/or cantors who wanted dancing to happen could create the atmosphere in which it did. And in the cases where the rabbi felt comfortable and wanted to dance himself, it was more likely that congregants would dance as well.

Additionally, dance was more likely to happen in synagogues that did not emphasize decorum as much. According to my findings, while the Reform synagogues which continued in the classical mode may have introduced *hakkafot* in the 1960s or 70s, they were less likely to have incorporated dance into the celebration.

*Simchah*

Rabbi J. brought up an interesting point about the relationship between *hakkafot* and *simchah* (rejoicing) in his experience from the 60s through the early 90s. In his words, while the rest of the year the worship style was formal and decorous, "On Simchat Torah we tried to informalize it, to rejoice, and to walk around with the Torahs." Afterwards, when the staff would gather to talk about it, they would always complain about a kind of "forced celebratory mood" they had felt during the service. Although the service was "enjoyable," J. didn't think that the congregants "got lost in the mood of the service." Rather, they maintained a sense of "reserve." And every year, the staff would always raise the question of how to "generate *simchah*" the next year on Simchat Torah.

We might conclude that there is a connection between an atmosphere of decorum and the potential for genuine expression of *simchah* through *hakkafot* and dance on Simchat Torah. In Stern's synagogue, where decorum was the norm, it felt "forced" to celebrate through physical movement. People seemed to feel inhibited and unable to let go. However, he had greater success in creating a "spiritual feeling" through other rituals. For instance, the relatively new practice of stretching out the entire Torah and having the congregants hold it added "a spirituality. . . a mystical feeling to the experience" that J. didn't think they had when they did *hakkafot*. In fact, many rabbis mentioned this custom of unrolling the entire Torah, describing the practice as "spiritual," "moving," and "powerful."

For many Reform congregations, especially those with classical roots and with rabbis who grew up in the Reform tradition, physical movement is not necessarily the most natural expression of spirituality or of *simchah*. On the other hand, many rabbis

from synagogues whose worship style was originally quite formal, spoke of how the feeling of *simchah* on *Simchat Torah* increased over the years, as the value placed on decorum decreased. In other words, it is possible to change the worship culture into one where the leadership and the congregants feel relaxed and uninhibited enough to experience *simchah* through *hakkafot* and dance. Several rabbis stressed the fact that physical movement is integral to creating an exciting, participatory, *freilach* (joyful) experience on Simchat Torah.

**Conclusion**

This brief history of *hakkafot* in Reform synagogues shows how the practice evolved from its banishment in the early years of Reform to its reemergence in the last third of the 20th century. For early reformers in Europe and the United States, *hakkafot* represented the primitive, undignified elements of traditional Judaism. When *hakkafot* were reintroduced in the United States, starting mostly in the 1960s and 70s, congregants from classical backgrounds often associated the practice with Orthodox Judaism. However, other Reform synagogues which didn't have classical roots more readily embraced the practice. Rabbis from traditional backgrounds were more likely to introduce *hakkafot* into their congregations earlier, while rabbis who grew up in the Reform movement were not familiar with the practice and did not start doing *hakkafot* until the movement began to embrace traditional rituals in the 1970s. Most rabbis in the study reported increased festivity and rejoicing on Simchat Torah as time went on. We can point to a number of reasons for this, including the involvement of children through consecration, strong rabbinic and cantorial leadership, and a new openness in the Reform

movement to more traditional rituals. Most importantly, however, as the level of decorum decreases, there are more opportunities to try more traditional forms of rejoicing, especially through physical movement.

## Conclusion

For millennia, circular movement and dance have played a vital part in human ritual. And, as we have seen, Jewish communities have been using these forms of physical movement in sacred space at least since the time of the Temple.[1] Possibly as early as the post-Temple period in Palestine, and certainly by the geonic period in Babylon, Jews incorporated the practice of *hakkafot* and celebratory dancing into Simchat Torah practice.

In the geonic and rishonic periods, *hakkafot* around the Torah scroll were meant to remind the community of the *hakkafot* around the Temple altar. However, as the second day of Shemini Atzeret slowly became recognized as Simchat Torah, the rituals took on the layer of rejoicing in the *siyyum* of the Torah-reading cycle. In fact, while *hakkafot* were specifically meant to simulate the circling of the Temple altar, dance may have been more closely connected to celebrating the *siyyum* of the Torah-reading cycle.

Some Ashkenazi communities in Medieval Europe began to adopt *hakkafot* on Simchat Torah as early as the 14th century, and by the time of the Shulchan Aruch (mid-16th century), *hakkafot* were the normative form of rejoicing on Simchat Torah. The kabbalists, first in Spain, and then in Tsfat, took *hakkafot* to a new level of theosophical meaning. For them, the *hakkafot* could effect a unification in the sefirotic realm and bring blessing into the world. Under the influence of Lurianic kabbalah, circling with the Torah and dancing around it became the essence of Simchat Torah celebration. Even Reform Judaism, which initially banned any kind of physical

1. We also have ample evidence of physical movement and dance used in ritual in the Hebrew Bible.

movement during services, eventually brought *hakkafot* and dance back into Simchat Torah practice. How fitting: that the holiday which celebrates the never-ending cycle of Torah through time should have circular movement in space as its central ritual.

Mircea Eliade links religious experience with different kinds of space: "Sacred space, and hence a strong, significant space. . ." and profane space, which is "amorphous," and not strongly delineated.[2] The delineation of sacred space has the effect of revealing "the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation," and "the discovery or projection of a fixed point -- the center -- is equivalent to the creation of the world. . . ."[3] Moreover, a human being cannot "through his [or her] own efforts. . . consecrate a space."[4] Rather, "the ritual by which he [or she] constructs a sacred space is efficacious in the measure in which it reproduces the work of the gods."[5]

On Simchat Torah, *hakkafot* and dance with and around the Torah scrolls construct such sacred space. The Torah scroll becomes the central, fixed point, symbolizing Israel's God, while the act of circling imitates God's creation of the world. We might further understand *hakkafot* as a physical representation of the Jewish people's continuous connection to God through Torah. Clearly, the Torah becomes the fixed point at the center of the *hakkafah* on Simchat Torah. However, all year long and throughout history, the Torah stands at the center of Jewish life and at the center of the encircling covenant between God and Israel.

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2. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1987) 20.
3. Eliade 21-22.
4. Eliade 29.
5. Eliade 29.

# Appendix #1

## The Role of Dance in Chasidic Lore

### I. Hebrew Sources:

**1) רז, שמחה. *סיפורי צדיקים*.קול מבשר:ירושלים, 2000.**

פרק, "ריקוד וסגולתו", ע' 345-348.

- טפח מעל הקרקע
- דבקות
- איבוד חושים
- זכות הריקוד תעמוד לנו
- לך הכל יכתירו
- שמח אני בשמחתו

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- "The Dance of Healing," p. 90
- "This is the Time to Dance," p. 91
- "The Dancing Bear," p. 94
- "Dancing and Pain," p. 98

# Appendix #2

## Reform Observance of Simchat Torah
## A Survey of Reform Practice at NAORRR

**PART ONE: Basic Information**
**Please list Synagogue(s)/institution(s) you have served as a rabbi/spouse. If more than a single synagogue, please use a separate number below for each one. For each synagogue, please answer the following:**

1. Name of synagogue: Location (city, state):
Which years did you serve?
Which of those years were you the senior rabbi, in charge of determining practice?

2.

3.

**PART TWO: Background Questions**
1. Briefly describe the **size** and **worship style** of the synagogue you served. (For instance, "Classical Reform, over 1000 family units; Traditional, about 150 family units, etc.")

2. Describe the prayerbook used and the ritual customary during the Torah service in a **regular Shabbat service**. (Indicate if it was Friday night or Saturday morning):

3. Did you do a full hakafah (procession around the whole or most of the sanctuary) with the Torah scroll during a regular Shabbat service? Why or why not?

3A. If the answer to 3 (above) was "yes," how did people treat the scroll? (did they bow to it? kiss it with their prayer books? other?)

4. If this changed, when did it change, *to what* did it change, and why?

**PART THREE: Simchat Torah**

1. Describe what happened on Simchat Torah in the synagogue(s) you served, in as much detail as you can (feel free to write on the back):

2. Did you do *hakafot* (processions around the whole or most of the sanctuary) with the Torah scrolls on Simchat Torah?

3. If you did *hakafot*, describe them. (Was there music? What kind of music? Singing? Who participated in the procession? Were children involved? men? women? How many times did you circle the sanctuary? When in the service did you do the *hakafot*? How did people treat the scroll? [bow, kiss it with their prayer books? other?])

4. If you did *hakafot*, why did you do them? If not, why not?

5. If you introduced *hakafot* in a place where they were not done previously, when did you introduce them and why?

6. In some synagogues, it has become common to dance with the scrolls, or at least to simulate dancing by not just carrying them formally in a procession. Did anyone dance in the synagogue on Simchat Torah? If so, describe the dancing (was there live music? dance instructors? was there spontaneous or organized dancing? did you as Rabbi participate? did you lead it? who participated? just children? men? women?)

More comments:

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