

Simchat Torah 5787

Rambam, Hilchot Tefillah 13:1

The common custom throughout all Israel is to complete the [reading of] the Torah in one year. [The cycle] is begun on the Sabbath after the Sukkot festival, reading the *sidrah, Bereshit*. On the following Sabbath, [the *sidrah*,] *Eleh toldot* [is read]; on the third, [the *sidrah*,] *Vayomer Ado-nai el Avram*. We continue reading according to this order until the Torah is completed, during the Sukkot festival.

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

Bavli Avodah Zarah 19a

The Gemara relates: Levi and Rabbi Shimon, son of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, were sitting before Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, and they were learning the Torah portion. When they finished the book that they were learning and were ready to begin a new subject, Levi said: Let them bring us the book of Proverbs; and Rabbi Shimon, son of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, said: Let them bring us the book of Psalms. He compelled Levi to acquiesce, and they brought a book of Psalms. When they arrived here, at the verse: “But his delight is in the Torah of the Lord,” Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi explained the verse and said: A person can learn Torah only from a place in the Torah that his heart desires. Levi said: My teacher, you have given us, i.e., me, permission to rise and leave, as I wish to study Proverbs, not Psalms.

Maharsha on Avodah Zarah 19a

The Gemara deliberately tells the story in this fashion—“they finished a book”—to teach us that when one finishes one book, one should begin another, just as we do on Simchat Torah, based on the Midrash, because of the Satan’s accusation.

Tur, Orach Chaim 669

From the third scroll, we begin **Bereishit**, and we call this *Simchat Torah*, because we complete the Torah with it, and it is fitting to rejoice at its completion. It is customary to begin *Bereishit* immediately, so that **Satan will have no opportunity to accuse us**, saying: “They have already finished it and do not wish to read it anymore.”

We increase the number of *piyyutim* [liturgical poems], such as “*Asher Biglal Avot*”. There are places where they take out all the Torah scrolls and recite a piyyut for each one, each place according to its custom.

In Ashkenaz, it is customary for the person who completes the Torah and the person who begins it to make pledges of donations, invite all their friends, and hold a feast and celebration, making it a festival in honor of the completion and beginning of the Torah.

At the conclusion of the festival, we recite Havdalah in the Amidah and likewise over a cup of wine, in the same manner as Havdalah at the conclusion of Shabbat, **except that we do not recite the blessings over the candle or the spices.**

Rabbi David Harbater, Times of Israel, October 1, 2026

For generations, Simchat Torah was associated almost exclusively with joy: dancing with the Torah, singing, children waving flags, synagogues filled with celebration. Then, on Simchat Torah 5784, the day itself became inseparable from horror, massacre, hostage-taking, destruction and national grief.

Three years later, we cannot celebrate Simchat Torah as though that day never happened. Nor should we. The death of Moses and the national mourning that follows now speak to us in a way they did not before, because we too know what it means for an entire people to feel that its world has suddenly been torn apart.

