

Spiritual Healing in the Torah

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Ve'Zot HaBracha

The Blessing of Dancing Ourselves Into Our Renewed Epoch of Life

Dancing at the Celestial Wedding of Simchat Torah

I've been looking forward to Simchat Torah when we women in Bat Ayin swirl around in ecstatic dance while chanting songs of praise for the Torah. This year I'm also looking forward to dancing with my new daughter-in-law, who has promised to spend this pinnacle of the holiday season with us. Simchat Torah is truly a gift – a day charged with the spiritual energy of the prior holidays – Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot – when we receive the surrounding Light (*Or Makif*) for the entire year. This surrounding Light gives us the opportunity to reveal the Light of the year to come. Through our holy dancing, we can bring the lofty light of the preceding holidays all the way down to our feet. Rav Kook would highlight the mitzvah of dancing on Simchat Torah quoting the Netziv, Emek Devar on “You shall celebrate the Festival to Hashem, your G-d...” (*Devarim* 16:15). “The meaning of the word תָּחֹג /*tachog* – ‘celebrate’ includes happy celebration through circle dance.” Likewise, King David used the root ח-ו-ג/*chet/vav/gimel* as referring to dance in וְיָחֹגוּ /*yachogu* “They shall dance and move...” (*Tehillim* 107:27), as Metzudat David explains, וְיָחֹגוּ /*yachogu* – “a matter of dancing and movement.” Both my husband and I as well as our son and his new bride wish to reexperience the exalted event of their wedding. On Simchat Torah, which is compared to a wedding, we can expand our wedding celebration. The bride is the Torah and although we elect her groom as the Chatan Torah, we all wed the Torah on that day. The upper union that takes place during Simchat Torah empowers us all to connect to the higher realms and remove chaos from our lives by singing, dancing, and being joyous.

Letting the Torah Penetrate our Hearts and Unifying us All on Simchat Torah

On Simchat Torah we complete the cycle of the Torah reading with the weekly Torah portion of *VeZot HaBracha* – “And this is the Blessing...” This parasha is more than a story. As the final Torah portion, it is the manifestation of everything that came before it. We can connect to the energy of the entire Torah encapsulated within this portion. It is a coded text with specific energy and wisdom that can be personally applied to improve our lives each week. It is beautiful to see how reaching the end of the Torah scroll and the reading of *VeZot HaBracha* is immediately followed by the reading of the first portion, *Bereishit*. This conclusion and commencement of a new cycle show us the continuity in the Torah as a reflection of our lives. Whenever there is an end, there is always a new beginning. The first letter of the Torah ב/*beit* (from the word *Bereishit*) and the last letter of the Torah ל/*lamed* (from the word *Yisrael*) spell the word לֵב/*lev* – ‘heart.’ It is only by opening our hearts that we can connect to the Light of the Torah especially available to us during Simchat Torah. If the Torah is reduced to an intellectual exercise of the mind, without penetrating our hearts, then we have missed the point. Through opening our hearts during the circle dances of Simchat Torah we can tap into the moment of unity of all the people of Israel. Our Bat Ayin tradition that each of the different shuls visit each other and dance together on Simchat Torah highlights this unity experience. This is also reflected in *Parashat VeZot HaBracha* in which Moshe blesses each tribe individually but culminates in a collective blessing for the entire Israelite people. On Simchat Torah we are united, not by our level of knowledge or understanding, but rather through the joy of dancing and the equality in our connection to Torah. (Inspired by *The Torah Mystic, V'Zot HaBerachah, The Final Blessing*).

Uprooting Last Year's Leftover Crop and Entering a New Life Epoch

Simchat Torah demarcates the real New Year. Although we already welcomed the New Year on Rosh Hashana, we are in kind of an incubation period until the end of Simchat Torah, after which we become reborn into the daily day cycle of life. As we complete the last day of the holiday season, we are propelled forward into our renewed epoch of life. Simchat Torah both ends and begins a new season when we begin to pray for rain. We can sense the changing seasons through the fallen leaves, the moistening dew, and the cooling wind. Following this last Tishrei holiday is the time to sow new seeds in the ground for our winter crop. I learned an interesting insight when preparing my vegetable garden for planting the winter crop. My garden patch was replete with last year's Swiss chard and beat leaves that had seen better days. It was hard for me to uproot these greens since they were still alive, and I might have been able to make myself an occasional salad from them. I was also attached to these greens that had given me so much goodness throughout the year. As I pondered what to do, the notion that "we need to let go of the old to make room for the new" hit home in a deeper way. I needed to uproot my leftover greens barely surviving to make room for a new stronger, lusher, more abundant greener crop. My garden experience is a metaphor for life, and how difficult it is for many of us to let go of the past. People get stuck in the past because of our need for certainty. Certainty is one of the six human needs fundamental for survival. We need to feel certain that we can avoid hardships. We also like to feel certain about what's next - and letting go of the past means stepping into the unknown. It takes courage to let go of the familiar - even if it's negative. While masculine energy is about breaking through and letting go, feminine energy is about filling up and gathering. When there is still emotion tied to a memory, moving on from the past becomes increasingly difficult for those of us who are biologically predisposed to gather. Yet when there is a will there is a way. Identifying and acknowledging what is holding us back is the first step. Once we have identified why letting go of the past is so difficult, we can ask ourselves: "What are the reasons that you absolutely must move beyond this?" How will your life change when you learn how to let go of the past? Having a clear awareness of why we must let go will be the primus motor that will drive us to be dedicated to truly letting go of the old to make room for the new.

Emuna Healing Exercise for Letting Go of the Old to Make Room for the New

1. Settle down on your chair, cushion, or mat to give yourself a few moments to be alone with yourself tapping into the Divine spark within. This is your time for self-cultivation. Breathe slowly and mindfully, treasuring this moment with yourself and the Divine within.
2. You have come full circle. Another year has gone by, and here you are again, ready to celebrate the Torah. At this time of coming full circle, you are receiving surrounding or encircling Light (*Or Makif*) for the entire year. Now is the time - today and this Shabbat of Simchat Torah - to tap into the energy of this present moment.
3. "A generation comes, a generation goes, but the earth remains the same forever. All rivers run to the sea, but the sea is never full. The wise man will be forgotten along with the fool" (*Kohelet* 1:4-7). There is a message of deep liberation within what may seem depressing on the surface. Time passes, everything withers away, and we become one year closer to our last day: Yet, when we realize the futility of the past and future, all that remains is the present moment.
4. Breathe into this joyful, present-moment experience of the here and now. Make the present moment your moment of prayer, reflection, and emotional cleansing.
5. If a gardener wants to grow fresh tulips, she must first pull out some weeds or prune back last

year's overgrowth. If we want to grow into a fresh and new experience, we must allow something to die. We can choose to start pruning (the short way) or wait for the whole organism to wither (the long way). What are the weeds in your life? What is the overgrowth in your life that needs pruning?

6. We all carry wounds that we continually need to heal, in order to move forward. We must release the old to receive the new. Focus on this simple question: What can I let go of? Breathe into this question and repeat it to yourself as many times as you need. What can I let go of?

7. When we can truly release our past and our expectations and demands of the future, we can be reborn in the present. The last Portion of our yearly Torah cycle opens with, *Ve'zot HaBracha* - "This is the Blessing!" (*Devarim* 33:1). Right now, this moment is a moment of blessing. Breathe into the blessings of your life, and tune into these blessings you enjoy at the present moment to treasure them even more!

8. "It's never too late to be what you might have been (George Eliot, 1871). Imagine yourself as the person you could have been. Can you visualize your full potential self? Perhaps you visualize the gentle soothing tone with which you speak, the warm smile you give to everyone you meet, the delicate touch with which you caress the world. Now is the moment to meditate on who you really want to be!