

Rabbi Joshua Samuels  
Simchat Torah  
October 14, 2025

Two years ago tonight, we danced.

We filled this sanctuary with singing, with laughter, with the joyful chaos that only Simchat Torah can bring. We took the scrolls from the ark, we paraded with them around the room, and we felt the pure delight of being Jewish. We went home tired in the best way—our feet sore from dancing, our voices hoarse from singing. My wrists and forearms extremely sore from rolling the scrolls!

And then we went to sleep.

We woke up the next morning to the worst news of our generation. Of several generations.

Simchat Torah—this holiday of joy—became the darkest day of sorrow. In a matter of hours, the world changed. Innocence was shattered. What had been a night of celebration became linked forever to tragedy. For two years, when we have said “Simchat Torah,” we have also felt pain in our chest.

And yet—even then—we kept dancing.

We danced the next year, not because it was easy, but because it was necessary. We danced with heavy hearts. We danced in defiance. We danced because Jewish joy is an act of spiritual resistance. But even as we danced, something was missing. Our joy was thinner. Our breathing was tight. Our songs had an ache underneath as our brothers and sisters were held hostage in Gaza.

Tonight... the story turns.

Two nights ago, the news we have prayed for, marched for, cried for, refused to give up on... finally came.

**All the living hostages are home.**

Take that in. Let it sink deep. Those words—we have dreamed of saying them for 738 days—and tonight, we can. A prayer we didn't stop whispering. A hope we didn't let die. A miracle the world said was impossible. 738 days. This numbers add up to 18, *chai*, life.

And it happened...the night before Simchat Torah.

How could we not feel the hand of history here? Two years ago, Simchat Torah was the day everything broke. And tonight, it is the day we begin to breathe again.

We were just in the festival of Sukkot, and during Sukkot we read Kohelet —Ecclesiastes. Kohelet reminds us:

“A season is set for everything,  
a time for every experience under heaven.  
A time for weeping and a time for laughing,  
A time for wailing and a time for dancing...  
A time for war and a time for peace.”

For two years, we have been living in the time of weeping. The time of wailing. The time of war.

Tonight is the time for laughing again.

Tonight is the time for dancing again.

Tonight—yes, even if the peace is fragile and imperfect—as I wrote yesterday—is the time for peace.

This isn't about politics. This isn't about the details of agreements. This is about breath. This is about wholeness. This is about watching a people who have carried grief in their bones finally lift their heads and say: *We're still here.*

This is about the miracle of Jewish resilience.

Because we are the people who refuse to disappear.

We are the people who rebuild, even from ashes.

We are the people who sing even with broken hearts.

We are the people who show up—for each other, for our faith, for our future.

Think about what we do on Simchat Torah. Every year—no matter what—we finish the Torah, and we start it again. Even in exile. Even in catastrophe. Even when we were forbidden to gather. Even in the valley of the shadow of death. We kept reading. We kept studying. We kept dancing.

The Torah does not end in despair. It ends with a blessing, with Moses standing on a mountain, looking toward the Promised Land. It ends facing possibility. And when we roll it back to the beginning, we don't just return to page one. We return to creation. To light. To hope. To new beginnings. We declare: The world can be made new again.

Tonight isn't just another Simchat Torah.  
Tonight, we are rolling back more than parchment.  
We are rolling back our grief.  
We are rolling back our fear.  
We are beginning again—with joy.

Now, is it a Tuesday night? Yes.  
Are we going to party like it's a Saturday night in Jerusalem? Probably not.

But joy doesn't care what day it is. Joy shows up whenever hope returns.

Tonight, we will do what Jews have always done when the sea parts, when the walls fall, when the captives return home:  
We will dance.

We will dance even if we're a little tired.  
We will dance even if we're still healing.  
We will dance because our hearts are finally light enough to let our feet move again.

And we will dance with the Torah—our oldest companion, our deepest wisdom. The Torah has held our story through every exile, every pogrom, every heartbreak, every miracle. It has always led us from darkness back into light.

And tonight, we let it lead us once more—into joy.

In a moment, we will open the ark and take the scrolls out. We will march around with them. Take one, dance with it and then pass it to someone else. Then, we will form a circle around the sanctuary that stretches across generations—ancestors to grandchildren, history to future. And in the center of that circle is the beating heart of the Jewish people.

Tonight, we dance with the Torah.

We choose life.

We choose joy.

We choose each other.

Am Yisrael Chai.

Let's dance.