

Simchat Torah and Storytelling
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This one pager can be used to host an event about *Simchat Torah* and Storytelling (or just *Simchat Torah...or just storytelling*). There are quotes and reflection/discussion questions—feel free to use all the questions/quotes or just pick the ones you like!

Introduction

Simchat Torah is our holiday that celebrates our completion of another annual reading of the Torah from beginning to end. Our Torah is filled with stories, laws, rituals and traditions that we read every year. Some of us know our Torah orally and some of us go by the written word of the Torah. *Simchat Torah* marks a passage of time and gets us ready to do it all over again!

Quotes and Reflection/Discussion Questions

- What was your favorite story as a kid? Why was it your favorite? Who were the characters?
- What stories does your family tell, if any? Are they fictional or based in truth?

“The great questions – “Who are we?” “Why are we here?” “What is our task?” – are best answered by telling a story. As **Barbara Hardy** put it: “We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative.”

This is fundamental to understanding why Torah is the kind of book it is: “Not a theological treatise or a metaphysical system but a series of interlinked stories extended over time, from Abraham and Sarah’s journey from Mesopotamia to Moses’ and the Israelites’ wanderings in the desert. Judaism is less about truth as system than about truth as story. And we are part of that story. That is what it is to be a Jew.” - **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

- What does it mean to you to be part of the Jewish story?

“Ribono shel olam, God of the Universe, listen to my heart and my voice as I stand before You, wanting to tell our story. Help me to understand and find the right feelings and words with which to transmit the tale. Make my voice expressive and clear so that the collective wisdom of our people can reach the hearts of those who listen...”

- **Peninnah Schram**, “My Storyteller’s Prayer”

“In addition to promoting empathy, storytelling is a powerful educational method [...] As the storyteller speaks, the essence of the story and its lessons are reinforced in the storyteller’s memory and the listener’s memory, and as the story reaches deep into the audience, they are changed and moved at the same time.” - **Yonah Kirschner**

- Do you ever remember a story or memory differently than someone else?

“The voice is the messenger of the heart. We tell stories with the voice from the heart to reach the hearts of others.” - **Peninnah Schram**

- Is it hard or easy for you to share what’s on your heart? Do you have certain people that you always share with?

“We, as storytellers, should listen to the kinds of stories we need to tell, [...] “We must listen to the message of the story and feel its importance to our lives. We must listen to the rhythm of the story, as to a musical composition. We must listen to the silences within the story. We must listen to what the listeners of the story need to hear.” - **Peninnah Schram**

- What do you think is the most important part of the story of Judaism?
- What story in the Torah feels the most important to your life?

Activities

- Have people write, act, share out their favorite stories from life, the Torah, etc.
- Encourage people to create a new story about their family, a beloved tradition, etc.

Resources

<https://covenantfn.org/articles/listening-heart-lessons-jewish-storyteller/>

<https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/pb-daily/folklore-and-jewish-storytelling>

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shemini-atzeretsimchat-torah-101/>