

NCYI Youth Groups Shmini Atzeres / Simchas Torah Guide

From **ABCs of Sukkot**
by [Rabbi Shraga Simmons](#)

Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah

Immediately following Sukkot is one more holiday called Shmini Atzeret, literally the "Eighth Day of Assembly." This is a time to cease the busy activity of the holiday season and simply savor the special relationship with the Almighty before heading out into the long winter season. It is a separate holiday from Sukkot, meaning that the She'hecheyanu blessing is recited, and the obligation to sit in the Sukkah does not apply.

On Shmini Atzeret, Yizkor is recited in the synagogue.

The next day is Simchat Torah, which celebrates the completion -- and new beginning -- of the annual Torah reading cycle. In the synagogue, all the Torah scrolls are taken out of the Ark, and the congregation dances "seven circuits" amidst great joy and song. [Click here for the text and audio recordings of the most popular Simchat Torah melodies.](#)

In Israel, Simchat Torah is held the same day as Shmini Atzeret.

Wishing you a joyful Sukkot!

This article can also be read at: <http://www.aish.com/h/su/dits/62549892.html>

Questions and Answers

[By Chayim Boruch Alevsky from chinuch.org](http://chinuch.org)

1. תשרי עשרת is on the _____ day of תשרי.

2. What is the idea of the יום טוב of עשרת? _____

3. שמחת תורה is on the _____ day of תשרי.

4. What is the idea of the יום טוב of שמחת תורה? (*What are we celebrating?*) _____

http://chinuch.org/item_details.php?mid=3064

Shemini Atzeres & Simchas Torah Stories

Give And Gain

http://www.chabad.org/kids/article_cdo/aid/5356/jewish/Give-And-Gain.htm

The Torah commands the Jewish farmer to give away one tenth of his produce to the Levites and needy. This tenth part is called *maasser* (tithe). On *Shemini Atzeret* we read a famous portion in the Torah, beginning with the words *asser t'asser*, meaning, You shall surely give tithe.

The reason this portion is read on *Shemini Atzeret*, Will be discovered, if we remember that *Sukkot* is the Festival of Ingathering and *Shemini Atzeret* is the eighth day of *Sukkot*(although it is really a separate festival). In other words, this is the time when all the produce of the land has been gathered in. It was, therefore, the time of giving away what was due to the Priests and Levites and other landless and needy people.

Our Sages see in the words *asser l'asser* an indication of a promise of riches to him who faithfully observes the law of *maasser*. For the Hebrew words *asser* (to give a tenth part) and *osher* (riches) are derived from the same root. And so their saying became famous: *Asser, bishvil shetisasher*, meaning, Give away a tenth that you may become rich. The Talmud contains many stories of how people who observed the law of *maaser* were amply rewarded. 'We will tell you one story here:

Once upon a time there lived in ancient Israel a farmer whose land produced a thousand bushels of wheat, year after year. Being a pious Jew who observed the *mitzvot* of the Torah, his first act after harvesting was to set apart a full tenth of the produce as a *maaser*. In his case, it was one hundred bushels of wheat, which was quite a substantial fortune. But the farmer

cheerfully gave it away to the servants of G-d. in the Beit Hamikdosh and to the needy. The remaining nine hundred bushels were more than enough to take care of all his needs, with a tidy sum of money in savings. The man was getting more prosperous every year.

The time came to leave this earthly world, and the pious and wise farmer called his only son to his bedside:

"My dear son," said the dying man: "G-d is calling me, and I am happy to go, for I lived a good life, in accordance with the commandments of our holy Torah. Whatever I possess will now be yours, to do as you please. One thing I want to advise you. Our land produces one thousand bushels a year; never fail to give *maaser*, and it will not disappoint you."

The old man was gone, and his son now became the owner of the farm. When harvest time came, the land produced one thousand bushels of wheat, as ever before. The son set apart one hundred bushels for *maaser*, as his father had done.

Twelve moons passed, and once again it was time to give *maaser*. Now, the possession of wealth had had a bad influence on the young man. He thought that it was a shame to give away such a fortune, and he decided to give only ninety bushels, instead of the full one hundred.

The following year, however, the land produced not one thousand bushels but nine hundred.

Seeing his income decreased, the young farmer decided to make up some of the loss by reducing his *maaser*. Instead of giving away ninety bushels, he gave away only eighty.

He waited for the next year's harvest quite impatiently. To his consternation, the land produced only eight hundred bushels! Do you think the young man realized that he was playing a dangerous game? Indeed, no... He became stubborn, and kept on reducing the quantity of his *maaser*. At last a point was reached when his land produced only one hundred bushels, just as much as the *maaser* which was given away in the good old days when his father lived.

The foolish young man was filled with anger and sorrow. He invited his friends and relatives to his house, to comfort him in his misfortune. At the appointed time, the invited guests appeared. But instead of giving him a sympathetic look and trying to comfort him, they looked as though they had come to celebrate.

The young man nearly lost his temper.

"Have you come to insult me, and mock me in my misfortune?" he cried with grief.

"Far be it from us," replied the guests cheerfully. "We have come to celebrate with you the transfer of your land from your hands into the hands of G-d. You see, until now you had been the owner of the fields, and you had given a tenth part of its produce to G-d's charges. Now, however, G-d owns the land, and you are His

charge, receiving a tenth part of what the land can produce. You have thus joined the ranks of the Levites, and we have come to congratulate you... "

The young man well understood the lesson which his friends taught him. He decided to change his evil ways. How right were the Sages when they said, *asser, bishvil shetishasher*.

Hakafot Under Fire

http://www.chabad.org/kids/article_cdo/aid/5357/jewish/Hakafot-Under-Fire.htm

The *hakafot* were in full swing. Round and round went the circle of dancing worshippers in the little *shul*, chanting a snappy *Simchat Torah* melody and dancing rhythmically to its tune. Circles formed and reformed as some dancers dropped out exhausted and others took their place, the dancers holding each other by the hand or shoulders. Now and again someone would strike up a new tune, and the pace would quicken with the rhythm of the new melody. Those who dropped out of the dancing circle would continue to participate by swaying to and fro, clapping their hands and urging the dancers on to renewed vigor.

I had come to watch, that's all. But I had come too close to the dancing circle. Somebody from the circle grabbed me by the arm and pulled me into the whirling mass of dancers. Somewhat bewildered at first, I soon caught up with the rhythm and excitement of the dancers. I now felt part of these lovely people who were dancing and rejoicing with G-d's greatest gift-the Torah. It was a wonderful feeling.

As the circle grew I found myself pushed more and more into the center, I turned my head to steal a glance at the man who had "roped me in." He was still resting his hand lightly on my shoulder. He seemed an elderly man, and I wondered where he got so much strength to dance and dance without end.

As his eyes were closed, I did not mind studying his face a little longer without seeming rude or curious. His lips were moving, but not a sound came from them. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead and face, and I was astonished to see that tears were streaming down his cheeks. An inner happiness and ecstasy were written all over his noble face. I felt drawn to him, and though I was almost exhausted, I should have been ashamed to admit it, seeing the lively energy of this elderly man.

Finally, the *hakafot* were over, and the circle broke up. The dancers sat down to relax and catch their breath. I followed my dancing neighbor and sat down near him.

"It's a long time since I had such inspiring *hakafot*," he said, wiping the perspiration from his face.

"Yes, it makes you feel good," I said, trying to keep up the conversation. I felt that if the gentleman would only continue to speak, it would be worth listening to.

"Good!" exclaimed my neighbor. "Young man, do you know what 'good' is? Have you ever felt so gratefully happy that you wept for joy?"

"Well . . ."

"Ah! Let me tell you of those *hakafot* many years ago, and you will know what I mean..."

I was never more interested in my life. My neighbor must have read my eagerness, and he did not keep me in suspense.

"It was about thirty years ago. Let me see, yes, exactly thirty years ago today, or rather tonight. Those were the terrible days after the First World War. I lived in Riga then, the capital of the newly born independent Republic of Latvia.

"That night of the *hakafot* we were sheltering in a cellar in the old city. The thud of cannon bombardment could be heard in the near distance, and the rattle of machine guns. For the German insurgents under Bermont were just across the river Dvina, and the city was resolutely defended by the nationalist forces. Things were not going well for the nationalists. They were losing ground, they were nervous, and they suspected treachery and espionage. Anybody that fell under suspicion was put to the wall and shot, without even any investigation made.

"Now imagine that night, with a heavy bombardment by the enemy across the river, the sky overcast, and the whole city in a total blackout. Suddenly, sentries see a light through a window in a top floor apartment. The light dances up and down, then disappears. 'The spy nest has been discovered at last! the sentries decide, and they rush to the house to lay their hands on the spy. They run up the steps, and down again. We can hear their heavy boots. Finally they burst into our cellar and cry, 'Where is the dirty spy?!'

As I raised my eyebrows, as if to say, I don't get it, the old man smiled.

"You are wondering what those sentries were doing in our cellar at *hakafot*? Well, then I must tell you about Zalman. His second name was Michelson, but hardly anyone knew it. He was better known as Zalman the Mattress-maker. He was as poor as a church mouse, but as cheerful and carefree as a lark. It goes without saying that he was a pious man. He did not know what it meant to be sad at any time, let alone at times when rejoicing was in order. Heaven knows, he had plenty to be worried about: many mouths to feed, a marriageable daughter, an ailing wife. But G-d had blessed him with a cheerful disposition, and seemingly nothing, absolutely nothing could break his spirit.

"Well, Zalman the Mattress-maker was with us in the cellar that night. That night of all nights, when Jews are expected to rejoice with the Torah, to dance with the Torah, there we were sitting downcast, depressed, shivering in our skins every time an explosion shattered the silence.

"Zalman could not stand it any longer. 'Brothers!' he exclaimed. 'It's *simchat* Torah to-night! We must rejoice! But his words fell flat upon our ears. He looked hurt for a moment, then he suddenly remembered something. 'I see, my friends, that without a drop of *shnapps* there will be nothing doing. Well, I just remembered: I have a pint of *shnapps* in the cupboard at home, which I have been saving for tonight. Clean forgot! I'll be back in a jiffy.'

"We looked at him in amazement. 'Are you crazy, Zalman? You cannot climb all those steps to the sixth floor, with shrapnel flying about, and bullets, and broken glass and masonry-for a pint of *shnapps*! Don't be a fool, Zalman.'

"But Zalman said: 'Don't worry, brethren. We have a great and mighty G-d. I'll be right back, and then we will celebrate *hakafot*.' And before we could hold him back forcibly, he had disappeared, taking with him a candle...

"Zalman climbed to the sixth floor, where he lived. He lit the candle and found the bottle. He was so happy, that he danced about with the candle burning in one hand, and the bottle in the other, forgetting all about the war, the bombardment, the regulations. It was in this state that he finally came back to us in the cellar.

"Now, my young friend, you understand what the sentries saw in the darkness of the night....

"It was just as we prepared to celebrate *hakafot*, that the sentries burst in crying, 'Where is the dirty spy?!'

"We were horror-struck, and remained speechless. 'We knew what it meant to be accused of spying. 'Turn the spy over to us, or we will have you all shot!' the sentries shouted. 'Somebody was giving signals to the enemy a few moments ago, and the arsenal is but a block away! You dirty Jews would have us all blown up, would you? For the last time, who was giving the signals to the enemy?'

"At this moment Zalman stepped forward, bottle in hand, and calmly said: 'Officers, it was I whom you saw with a light upstairs, but I was not signaling to the enemy. I..."

"Never mind, come along!" the soldiers said briskly, and marched poor Zalman off under heavy guard.

"If we had been depressed before, now we were truly grief-stricken. Poor Zalman! He would be put to the wall and shot immediately. No questions asked. Every time we heard a burst of machine gun or rifle fire, we thought, there goes poor Zalman. Many of us cried. 'We immediately pledged ourselves to support poor Zalman's widow and orphans, and to place a stone on his grave, if his body were delivered to us by the authorities.

"Time dragged on slowly. We thought the night would never end. All the time we were talking about the late Zalman and his poor bereaved family. Everybody had a good word about Zalman, how he cheered everybody up at all times, how he was the life of every *simchah*, every wedding and happy occasion, whether he was invited or not, he was always welcome....

"Suddenly we heard steps, and presently in walked --who do you think?-- Zalman! We couldn't believe our eyes. We thought it was a ghost. But no, the bottle in his hand looked real enough. Zalman was deathly pale, but happy and smiling, as always... We rushed at him and nearly floored him. Everybody tried to kiss him and embrace him. There were tears in all eyes. Some of us mumbled, Blessed be He who revives the dead...

" 'Stop it! Stop!' cried Zalman. 'I love you, too, but there is no time for that now. Let's celebrate *hakafo!*' But we would not start with *hakafo!* until he told us what happened to him, and by what strange miracle he had escaped certain death.

" 'Didn't I tell you, we have a great and mighty G-d?' Zalman began. 'Well, when I was brought to headquarters and placed before the officer on duty, he hardly looked up at me. 'To be shot' he called out. 'No time to investigate.'

" 'I looked at the officer for a moment, a thought flashed in my mind, and I called out: 'Styopka! What on earth are you saying?!

" 'The officer looked up sharply, gazed at me for a moment, then burst out laughing. 'What a joke! You, Zalman, a spy! Ha, ha, ha! And with that bottle in your hand ... Ha, ha, ha! Well, well, sit down, let's talk about old times. Do you remember when I used to come to your house to remove the candlesticks on Saturday mornings, and light a fire in the winter? I used to get a nice slice of white bread, let me see, *challah* you called it. I was a kid then, but you treated me as though I was a grown up. I loved you, Zalman. Those were happy days in our little town, quiet and peaceful. But these are grim days... You are lucky that I was on duty tonight. It was not even my turn, but I was substituting for a friend. You would have been a dead duck by now. But, say, what's the idea of the bottle? Is it Purim tonight?'

" 'You ought to know better, Stephan Ivanovitsch,' says I to him. 'Purim is at the end of winter, and it's the fall now. No, it's *Simchat Torah* tonight.'

" 'Sure, I remember. You go round and round in a circle dancing...'

" 'That's what we were going to do tonight, when we were 'slightly' interrupted...'

" 'Well, go back to your dancing, and say a prayer for us, Zalman. You Jews are marvellous, risking your neck for your religion, dancing in the shadow of death....'

"That was Zalman's simple story. He got a special pass to come back to us at once, and to use at all times of curfew in the future. And then we began *hakafot*.

"...Oh, those *hakafot*! I'll never forget them. Every time I celebrate *hakafot*, I remember them; for the last thirty years!"

Then he began to hum a melody: "Swing your feet and raise your voice, with our Torah, do rejoice!"

Simchat Torah Of A Cantonist

http://www.chabad.org/kids/article_cdo/aid/5358/jewish/Simchat-Torah-Of-A-Cantonist.htm

Simchat Torah in the "Soldiers' Synagogue" of the town S. in old Russia was a wonderful sight. There was true and genuine rejoicing with the Torah in that little synagogue, where most of the members were one-time cantonists.

The most impressive sight was when at the height of the rejoicing, one of the old soldiers, while dancing with a Scroll of the Torah in his arms, would puff his shirt open, disclosing deep scars on his chest and shoulders, and would sing, "Torah, Torah, I love thee." After the *hakafot* we, the youngsters in the little synagogue, would surround him and beg him to tell us all about those scars. Spellbound we listened to his tale though we had heard it so many times before. This is what he related:

"I was a little boy of eight when the terrible order came to my father, Rabbi Shlomo, his memory be blessed, to hand over twenty boys from our town for the Czar's army. There was a great outcry in our small town. To all those parents who had any

boys of my age, my parents included, it meant a day of judgment. If all the children in town would have died of a plague on one day, the tragedy would not have been as great as it was now.

"In my father's house were gathered all the leading members of our community. Some of the wealthier members offered large sums to the community chest if their sons were spared. But my father would have none of it. He demanded that all children be treated alike, and that the recruiting should be done by casting lots.

"Young though I was, I realized how terrible the tragedy was, and lying in my bedroom pretending to be asleep, I heard many a raised and excited voice in the adjoining room, where the meeting was taking place.

"And what about your Dovidel?' I shivered when I heard my name mentioned.

"Of course he will be no exception,' I heard my father's grave reply. The meeting continued almost all night, but I had fallen asleep before it ended.

"When I awoke in the morning I found my mother sitting at my bedside, her eyes red from weeping and from lack of sleep. She embraced me as soon as I opened my eyes, and I felt two hot tears burning on my cheek. No words were necessary. I knew I was to be one of those boys who would be sent away from home, perhaps never to see my parents again.

"Don't cry mother,' I said, 'I will come back.'

"What I am worried about, Dovidel,' my mother said, 'is whether you will come back a Jew.'

"Mother, I will always be a Jew,' I said resolutely.

"The scene was repeated again as I sat on my father's knee in his little study. He spoke to me for a long time. There were no tears in his eyes, but I knew his heart was breaking.

"Father did not live long after. About a week before the boys had to be delivered, he died.

"A few days later, two strangers came to town. They said they came to buy cattle from the surrounding farmers. Rumors spread that they were kidnappers. People whispered that they had been bribed by the wealthy families to leave their children alone and to fulfill the quota by kidnapping the boys of the poor families. My father's plan was not heeded.

"The day the kidnappers came, our town seemed to have lost all its boys. Mother hid me in the cellar. Then the kidnappers came to our house. I heard rude voices, a faint tussle, then a gasp and a thud, as if a lifeless body had fallen to the floor. I could not stay in my hiding place, I climbed up the steps leading to the trap-door and cried, 'Mother, are you alright? Let me out!'

"The next moment firm hands grabbed me and I was taken away. I saw my mother lying on the floor. I fought desperately, but it was to no avail. I could only cry, 'You brutes, you killed my mother.'

"Your mother will be alright,' they said. 'Now you be a good boy or you will be sorry.'

"We boys were led away in two wagons. We were roped together, with the end of the rope tied to the wagon. The whole town turned out to see us off, and my mother was there too. I will never forget that parting. An armed guard surrounded our wagons and held the people at bay. But suddenly my mother tore forward and managed to throw me a little package. 'Don't forget your Bar Mitzvah,' were her parting words. It was a pair of *tefillin* and a little prayer book, but my Bar Mitzvah was so far off....

"Well, I will not tell you what I went through in the next three years of my 'training.' It was not a military training, but a systematic preparation for conversion, with endless beatings and tortures whenever we refused to go with our heads uncovered, or to kiss the cross; and we always refused.

"During these years I came to be regarded as the 'chief' of our group. Being the son of a rabbi and having learned a great deal more than the others, they all looked up to me for guidance and encouragement. I knew that if I should show the slightest weakness, the spirit of the boys would be broken by the cruel and horrible 'training' we were getting.

"Somehow, the sergeant who was in charge of our group got wind of it. From that time on he concentrated all the 'heavy artillery' on little me. I was to be the example for the other boys by renouncing my faith.

"Well they did not have an easy time of it, and the deep scars that you can see will tell you that I had no easy time of it either.

"One day, after a terrific beating, I was brought before the sergeant. A priest was present and he tried to appear very friendly and concerned. A long talk followed and whenever one of them stopped to catch his breath, the other one took over. I was told of a bright future, of a brilliant career in the military academy, of the dashing uniform of a general, and the honor and power of a governor; but if I refused, I would die miserably, never seeing my mother again.

"On and on they talked, but I was hardly able to follow all they said. I was only aware of an acute pain all over my body, and an agonizing thirst. I asked for a drink of water.

"The sergeant filled a glass of sparkling water, and as I reached for it he held it back.

"Not so fast, my boy, you must first give us an answer.'

"Please give me the water, I will give you an answer in three days,' I said desperately.

"The sergeant and the priest exchanged glances, and then I was allowed to drink the water.

"The next three days were the worst that I had ever had. I lay on my bunk with all my body aching, but worse still was my mental agony. Could I hold out much longer? Should I give in? And then, I thought of my charges, the other boys of my group, and of my parents, and I shook my head and cried, No, no, no!' And so it was, yes and no, all the time.

"Finally, came the last night before the fateful day. I was visited by the sergeant. 'You are looking fine, my boy. Won't it be a great day tomorrow?'

"It sure will,' I replied. He went away greatly elated, feeling quite certain that the morrow would be a day of triumph for him, a day of promotion, when the general would pat him on his back and say, 'Well done, Ivan,' and the priest would bless him with eternal life for having 'saved a soul.'

"That night I had a strange dream. I was back in my little town at the bank of our stream, where I dived in for a swim. Suddenly, I felt a terrible cramp and I was unable to swim any longer. I became frightened and gasped for breath. I wanted to shout for help but could make no sound. I was drowning... Then I saw a straw floating nearby, and in desperation I grabbed for it. Suddenly the straw turned into a mighty golden chain, the farther end of which was firmly and securely fastened to a tree growing on the river's brink. As I caught the end of the chain nearest to me, I saw that it consisted of many links growing bigger and bigger the further removed they were from me. Then I saw golden words engraved in the links and when I looked closer I could read, 'Abraham, Isaac, Jacob,' on the biggest and remotest three links, followed by many other names so familiar to me from the Bible. When I looked at my own link I saw my own name engraved on it, and it was securely held by my father's link.

"For a moment I felt secure and happy, but then to my great horror I saw that my link was slowly breaking apart. One more minute and it would completely break away from the chain, and I would be drowned....

"No, no! I cried. 'Don't break!' I woke up with a start and my little heart was pounding away. I lay crying the rest of the night.

"The big mess-hall was filled to capacity. At the dais sat many military men and among them my own sergeant and the priest. In the hall sat many young Jewish recruits from my own group, as well as from other nearby units. An elaborate affair was planned for my 'conversion.'

"When I was led up to the dais and was ceremoniously asked to declare my willingness to become a Christian, I did not answer immediately. I turned around, deliberately gazing at my fellow-Jewish recruits, at the walls adorned with various swords and sabers, and through the window into the blue sky.

"They became impatient at the head table and prompted me again to tell them of my willingness to embrace their faith.

"Then I walked up to the wall and took down a small hatchet. Returning to the table I placed three fingers on it, carefully avoiding the middle one around which I hoped to wind the straps of *tefillin* one day, and before anyone realized what I was about to do, I lifted the hatchet and brought it down with all my strength upon my fingers.

"'There is your answer for the three days!' I said, waving my bloody hand in their faces. The next moment I fainted..."

Here the old cantonist paused and looked with pride at his left hand where the tips of three fingers were missing. He told us no more, but we knew that it was this very aged soldier who brought about the repeal of the Czar's cruel decree. For the story of the young boy's heroism and devotion to his faith was the talk of the whole imperial court. When Czar Nicholas heard of it, he knew that so long as there were boys like this David among his Jewish subjects, all his decrees were doomed to failure.

We looked admiringly upon the aged cantonist, but hero worship was something he could not stand. He jumped up from his place and went dancing and singing:

"The Torah is our only choice,

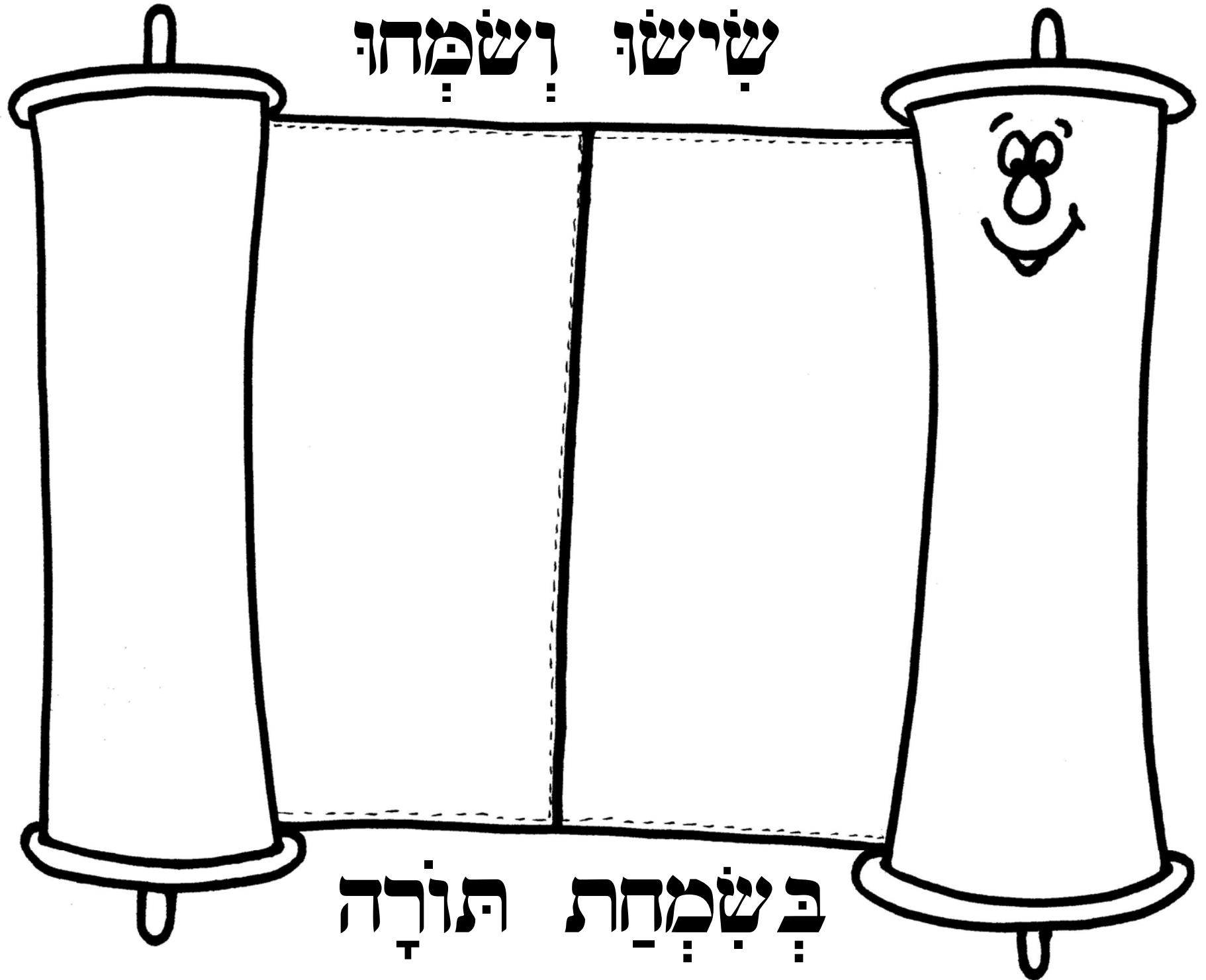
On Simchat Torah rejoice! Rejoice!"

Clip Art

http://free-bitsela.com/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=2768



עֵינַי וְשִׁמְחוּ



בְּשִׂמְחַת תּוֹרָה

Simchas Torah Flag

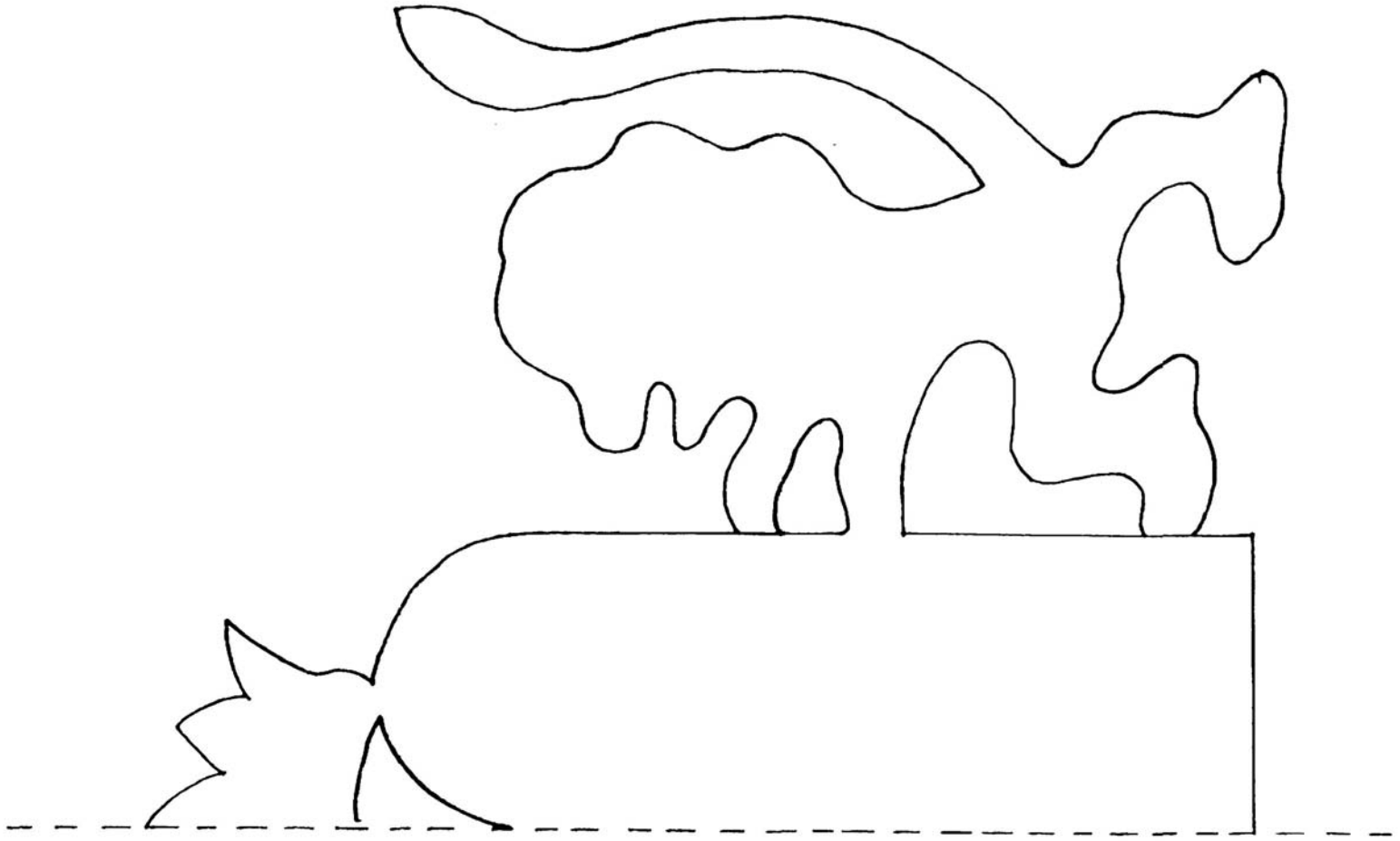


Materials:

- Colored paper
- Elmer's glue
- Scissors
- Glitter or glitter glue pens
- Skewer

Directions:

1. Fold the template sheet in half along the dotted lines.
2. Cut out the picture along the outline. (Make sure you are cutting both halves of the paper.)
3. Stick the outline, or copy it, onto colored paper.
4. Draw over the picture with Elmer's glue and sprinkle over with glitter or draw over the picture with glitter glue pens.
5. Let dry.
6. Cut the paper into a flag shape.
7. Glue one side onto a skewer.





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