

SIMCHAT TORAH

RESOURCE GUIDE

The Basics:

Simchat Torah and Shmini Atzeret are celebrated at the end of the holiday of Sukkot. After a month of celebrations - the new year, the day of atonement, and a week-long harvest festival - these closing holidays are the final blowouts of the season! We're known as "the people of the book," and Simchat Torah (literally: "Rejoicing in the Torah") is where we earn that title. We take all the Torah scrolls out of the ark and dance them around the room 7 times (hakafot), each round lasting up to 20 minutes! Let's face it - we might be obsessed, but who wouldn't be?! It's a single scroll that tells the story of our people and is an ancient guide to living a meaningful life - so once a year, when we reach the end of the scroll, we dance, we drink, we celebrate, and we immediately recommit ourselves to start reading it all over again. Shmini Atzeret then helps us transition from the holiday celebrations into the rhythm of the fall season by initiating our first prayers for rain.



Simchat Torah Playlist

Signature Cocktail and Mocktail:

The midrash in Song of Songs Rabbah compares the words of Torah to milk, representing life-giving nutrients, and honey, for sweetness. Bring the midrash to life this Simchat Torah with this signature cocktail - l'chaim!

COCKTAIL

Here is an amazing [Milk and Honey Cocktail recipe](#):

The milk and honey recipe uses just those two ingredients, [Benedictine](#) and milk. The liqueur puts the "honey" in the drink because its signature flavor is the natural sweetener, which is accented by 27 herbs and spices. While the cocktail is incredibly simple, it can be served in two different ways. either cold or warm, depending on your mood. Both offer an opportunity to enjoy the full flavor of Benedictine in an easy mixed drink.

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 ounces Benedictine
- 6 ounces [milk](#) (or enough to fill)
- Garnish: orange slice
- Garnish: cinnamon stick

Steps to Make It:

1. Gather the ingredients.
2. Pour Benedictine into a stemmed goblet or mug, add a few ice cubes, and top with cold milk. Stir well.
3. Garnish with a slice of orange and a cinnamon stick.
4. Serve and enjoy!



Recipe Variations:

To serve the milk and honey warm, top the shot of Benedictine off with warm milk. Be sure to [heat your milk slowly](#) and gently (never letting it boil) while stirring constantly so it doesn't curdle.

You can also dust the top of the drink with ground cinnamon and/or nutmeg if you prefer.

While a traditional milk and honey calls for Benedictine, you can break from the standard and pour another honey liqueur if you like. [Bärenjäger](#) would be the top-rated substitute, though you do lose that herbal background. Another good pairing for milk is a whiskey-based liqueur like [Jack Daniels Tennessee Honey](#), which will add a nice punch of flavor.

MOCKTAIL:

The Milktini

Ingredients:

FOR ALL MILKTINI'S

- ice
- 1 cup
- 2% milk

SASKATOON BERRY SLEEPOVER

- 2 tsp
- Saskatoon Berry Syrup
- 1 basil leaf

SWEET BEST FRIEND

- 2 tsp
- Apricot Syrup
- 1 tsp honey
- Sprinkle of nutmeg



VERY BERRY CRUSH

2 tsp
Raspberry Syrup
1 drop vanilla extract
Sprinkle of chocolate shavings

Directions:

1. For all recipes, put a handful of ice into a cocktail shaker and add 1 cup (250 ml) of milk (2% preferred, but any kind will do).
2. Add the syrup and vanilla or honey (as applicable) to the shaker. Shake the beverage to mix.
3. Pour the Milkini into a glass (a fancy cocktail glass is preferred!) and add the garnish (basil, nutmeg, or chocolate shavings). Note you can strain the ice out or leave it in the drink, depending on your preferences (and how hot it is outside!).

Decorate to Celebrate: Glass Etching Program

This program is designed to take place before heading out to a Simchat Torah celebration (or hosting your own). Are there already a lot of Simchat Torah events going on in your community but you still want to host something? This might be the program for you!

During Simchat Torah, It is customary across many communities for one to drink to celebrate the completion of the reading of the Torah. Did you know there are multiple blessings for drinking? You may be familiar with the standard blessing over wine, but did you know there is a separate blessing for beer and spirits that are not derived from the "fruit of the vine"?



Materials:

All of these can be found on this [Amazon shopping list!](#)

- One glass for each person (these must be actual glass and can be purchased for \$1 at any bargain store)
- 1 roll of masking tape
- 1 22oz jar of Armour Etch glass etching cream
- An assortment of paintbrushes (these should be very cheap)
- 1-3 hobby knives (razor blades)

The Activity:

Step One: Everyone selects which glass they would like to use and cleans it off with soap and water.

Step Two: Once the glasses are dry, you can use the masking tape to mark out designs on your glass. You could either use the straight lines of the tape to create your design or you could cover the entire design area with masking tape and use the hobby knife to cut out your design. Remember that the areas of exposed glass are the ones that get etched so cut and tape accordingly. You can also free-hand paint on the glass etching paste if you like just be sure to put it on thick and follow the instructions that came with your glass etching paste.

Step Three: Follow the directions on your glass etching paste for application. Don't forget to apply a thick layer so everything gets evenly coated.

Step Four: After waiting for the required amount of time, rinse off your etching paste and peel away any remaining tape.

Step Five: Wash out your glass again with soap and water and enjoy it!

Here is a [quick video](#) explaining the process.

The Discussion:

- While you work on creating your glasses, take some time to discuss some of the following topics or present some of the things you have learned about Simchat Torah.
- What is Simchat Torah?
- As we wrap up the High Holidays, what intentions and realizations do you want to bring in to your life in the new year?
- Think about a few pivotal moments in your life or times when something important in your life, or in who you are, changed or began to change. Do those pivotal moments have anything in common? How much of the change was a result of outside forces beyond your control? How much of the change was the result of your own initiative and choice?
- Spend time learning the blessings over beer and wine (below)

Check out any of these articles and discuss them with the group:

[Can I celebrate if I didn't study Torah all year?](#)

[Reimagining Simchat Torah so Our Rejoicing Lasts All Year](#)

Blessing over the Wine:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן
BA-RUCH A-TAH A-DO-NOI
ELO-HAI-NU ME-LECH HA-O-LAM
BO-RAI PRI HA-GA-FEN.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, Ruler of the
Universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine.

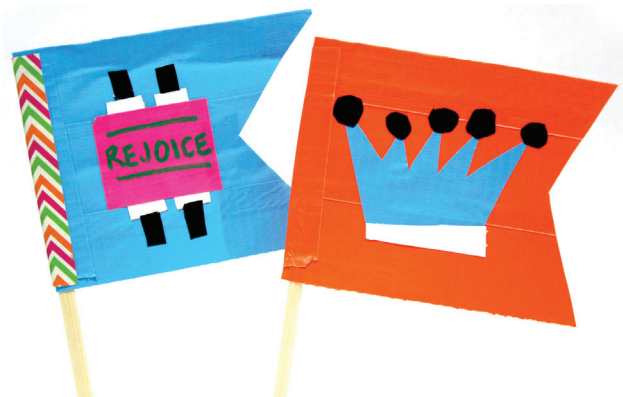
Blessing over other drinks (including beer and spirits):

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָה בְּדַבְּרוֹ
BA-RUCH A-TAH A-DO-NOI
ELO-HAI-NU ME-LECH HA-O-LAM
SHE-HA-KOL NI-H'YAH BI-D'VA-RO.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, Ruler of the
Universe, by Whose word all things came to be.

Wave Your Flag: Make a Simchat Torah Flag

In some groups, it is customary to bring a brightly colored and decorated flag to wave while others dance with the Torah. This year, consider making a flag that celebrates a year of studying the Torah and Jewish practice while also celebrating something about you or your community.



The Activity:

Spend time decorating flags of whatever size you like before heading out to a community Simchat Torah Celebration.

The Flag:

Materials: You can buy pre-made flags on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com), make your own with fabric and dowels from the craft supply store (or an old t-shirt), or even make your flags out of construction paper and coat hangers.

Decorating Supplies:

You could use fabric markers, permanent markers, stickers, glue, glitter, tape, the sky is the limit!

Design:

Traditionally, the flags have depictions of the Torah, celebrations, Hebrew writing or prayers but you can design them however you like. If you do a google image search for "Simchat Torah Flag" you will see lots of examples. Look out on facebook on October 11th for all the flags made by Moishe House staff!

Torah Trivia

Whether everyone is meeting at the house before heading out dancing, or you're just looking to add some fun to your upcoming shabbat meal, test your knowledge with this Torah trivia!

P.S. if you really want to get into it, make teams and prizes!

Trivia Cards

Each end of the Torah scroll is sewn onto the two wooden handles, what name do we give to these handles?

Atzei chaim, or "trees of life" (a euphemism for the Torah itself!)

What does the word "torah" mean in Hebrew?

The word Torah means "teaching" or "instruction."

The Torah contains what are often referred to as the 5 Books of Moses - how many can you name?

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

What happens if the Torah scroll is dropped?!

Tradition tells us that everyone present must fast for 40 days.

How much does an average Torah scroll weigh?

Torah scrolls average around 25 pounds! A Sephardic Torah, encased in wood and silver can weigh twice as much!

Jews read the Torah from beginning to end each year, one section every week, what is that weekly section called?

A
Parsha

How many letters are in the Torah?

There are 304,805 letters contained in a Torah scroll, It takes a specially trained scribe about a year to write one!

What are the materials used to make a Torah scroll?

Torahs are made up of between 62 and 84 sheets of parchment produced from the skin of a kosher animal that are sewn together. The pen used to write one is actually a quill from a kosher bird, usually a goose feather, and only special, permanent black ink is acceptable.

Simchat Torah Reflection

So often in our lives, we find that we are too busy to just take a moment to breathe and process what's going on. As we close out the High Holidays, take some time to reflect on where you've been and where you're going with the journaling and/or discussion activity. The beauty of Moishe House is that these programs can be tailored to fit your community and your needs! Whether at home with your journal or at a Simchat Torah pre-game with friends, take a moment to reflect on the passage of time and the ways in which we can actively take on this season of new beginnings:

The Materials:

- Discussion questions for the facilitator
- Paper or journals for each participant
- A writing utensil for each participant

The Set-up:

Take time to create a warm and welcoming space by arranging seating in a manner that allows everyone to be comfortable, at the same level and facing each other. Place paper for journaling (or actual journals) in the center of the seating area and make sure that you have writing utensils ready.

The Activity:

Start by setting some ground rules or making a group Brit or Kavanah. In Hebrew, a Brit is a contract or covenant or agreement, you may be familiar with the term in relation to a Brit Milah or a circumcision which is meant to commemorate the covenant that Abraham made with G-d. A Kavanah is an intention.

You can either start with a list of your intentions or rules for the conversation or let the group come up with them together. Letting the group work on the Brit together is a helpful way to increase buy-in to your discussion.

Once your intentions and rules are set, take time to have a discussion around the topics outlined below followed by time for everyone to write about their thoughts.

- What ideas, relationships, and passions are at the center of your life?
In what way can you recommit to those things that make you who you are?
- What has recently come to completion in my life and how might I celebrate it?
What new beginnings lie ahead in my life?
- Where in my life do I commit to doing the same thing over and over again? How does returning to the same thing after some time has passed allowing me to see it and myself in new ways?

For an added layer, you can take the time to let people create posters or collages to illustrate their thoughts. Any artistic medium is appropriate.

Facilitation notes:

1. Here are some tips to help make your conversation flow more naturally -
2. Make sure to give your group the time to process and answer the questions.
3. Don't be afraid of a little awkward silence.
4. Ask open-ended questions and avoid yes or no questions.
5. Encourage participants to explore their answers further by saying things like, "let's unpack that a little" or "tell me more about ____"
6. Invite personal stories
7. It's ok to stop a conversation and redirect it back on topic if you get too in the weeds

Check out this program guide from Hillel's Ask Big Questions Series:

<https://www.hillel.org/docs/default-source/hillel-conversation-guides/what-story-do-we-tell.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

Hillel and Ask Big Questions have put out this great facilitation guide for Simchat Torah. The ABQ model is a 3 part model of facilitation that involves individual exercises as well as group conversations and activities. They have amazing resources included here around how to actually facilitate a discussion and will give you most of the tools you need to be a really successful facilitator. If you'd like to dive deeper into this one, contact Josh Traulsen at josh.traulsen@moishehouse.org, he has participated in facilitation trainings with the ABQ directors.

