## Dear Families,

Simhat Torah celebrates the annual cycle of reading the Torah (the "Five Books of Moses" -- Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). Each year on this joyous holiday, Jews worldwide complete the cycle of Torah reading (the last verses of the book of Deuteronomy) and immediately begin reading from the book of Genesis. This cycle of reading illustrates the importance that Judaism places not only on the Torah, but also on study.

Simhat Torah celebrations are held in the synagogue, both at night and again the next morning; this is not an "at home" holiday. The most memorable ritual is the hakafah (revolution or circuit) made when the Torah is taken out of the ark and paraded around the synagogue, and sometimes into the street. In most congregations, every single Torah is taken out of the ark and paraded around the sanctuary for seven hakafot. Children are given festive flags (or bring homemade ones from school).

Simhat Torah is the one holiday that Jews are split on the day of celebration. For those who live in Israel, or who are Reform or Reconstructionist and live anywhere in the world, it comes on the eighth day of Sukkot. But for Orthodox and Conservative Jews who live outside of Israel, it is celebrated on the ninth day.<sup>1</sup>

In some congregations, Consecration (a ceremony that marks the beginning of a child's formal Jewish education, usually first grade) is held on Simhat Torah. Since Simhat Torah celebrates the cycle of learning and beginning again, it is seen as a perfect time to celebrate Jewish education. Often the children are invited onto the bimah (the front of the synagogue) to stand under a huge tallit for a special blessing from the rabbi.

## THINGS YOU CAN DO AS A FAMILY



The *Torah* is very special to the Jewish people. Talk with your children about a special toy or blanket they may have. How do they treat the object? How do they take care of the object? Compare this to the way we take care of a Torah. [It's housed in a special place called an *aron kodesh* (holy ark) and we dress it beautifully. We stand when it is being held, and people kiss it when it passes.]



In synagogue celebrations children march and dance with flags on Simhat Torah. Create colorful, festive flags with your children and take them to synagogue for the special Simhat Torah service.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This is because of issues that arose over 2000 years ago when Jews set the beginning of each month of the calendar by observing the appearance of the new moon, and communicating that information to those Jews who lived outside of Israel.



Attend a *Simhat Torah* celebration at a synagogue with your family. Most synagogues are very warm and inviting. Call individual synagogues for celebration times. When you return home, discuss with your children what they saw.



Judaism places an emphasis on learning and books (you may have heard the Jewish people referred to as "The People of the Book" . . . which refers to the *Torah*). Talk with your children about the importance of learning and reading books. Visit a synagogue (or even public) library and borrow a Jewish book to read at home with your family.



Take your child(ren) to a bookstore to pick out a favorite book, or if possible, a Jewish book. Donate the book to your child's classroom or a favorite child-friendly organization in honor of Simhat Torah.

For additional background information, family activities, and holiday recipes, see:

http://www.jccathisnewmonth.org (click on Tishrei)
or http://uahc.org/educate/parent/ (click on Simchat Torah)

