



SAMMY SPIDER'S FIRST SIMCHAT TORAH

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Sammy Spider and Josh both learn about the celebration of Simchat Torah—complete with Israeli flags, stories, conversation, and a parade through the synagogue.

As Sammy Spider looks on, Josh repeatedly asks to have a favorite story read to him. Josh loves the familiar, finds comfort in repetition, and finds something new in a book each time he hears it re-read to him. The Jewish people approach the Torah (first five books of the Bible) similarly, always finding something new to explore with each re-reading. When the annual cycle of Torah readings is complete, we celebrate *Simchat Torah* (Rejoicing in the Torah), which comes at the end of the Jewish harvest festival, *Sukkot*.

On the evening of *Simchat Torah*, Torah scrolls are carried lovingly around synagogues in parades called *hakafot*. Everyone sings and dances; children wave Israeli flags. The following morning, the last verses of the Bible, in the book of Deuteronomy, are read aloud, followed by the first verses of the first book, Genesis. And so the cycle of reading begins again.

To experience the happy occasion of *Simchat Torah*, contact a local synagogue or Jewish federation. To enhance the celebration, provide your children with supplies to construct a simple Israeli flag, making sure that the handle is made from materials safe for waving, such as cardboard or Styrofoam.

READING THE TORAH

What is Torah? The Hebrew word Torah means “instruction.” The Bible books that comprise Torah include history, genealogy, poetry, allegory and explanation of Jewish law. Around the first century, the Jewish sage and scholar Hillel was asked by a skeptic to explain the Torah while he stood on one foot. Patiently, Hillel replied, “That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. The rest is commentary; go and study.”

Simchat Torah is a fabulous time to explore a children’s version of the Bible. There is no need to experience the stories in order; it is fine to choose those that will appeal to your children now. In *Pirke Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers), we read about the Torah: “Turn it, and turn it again, for everything is in it.” Pj

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