

For שמחת תורה, the word שמחה. A nine-year-old boy was walking home from shul in the town of San Diego, California on שמיני עצרת eve. His father noticed the troubled look in his son's eye. "Is everything okay?" he asked, looking concerned. "Abba", the boy asked with all sincerity, "Do you think the Rabbi would allow us to bring the Torah to our home this year on שמחת תורה?" "No, son, the Torah stays in shul", the father replied factually. "You cannot take the Torah to our home." Without warning, the boy broke into uncontrollable sobs while the father struggled to understand why he was crying. After a few minutes, the son confided he wanted his mother, who was home in bed suffering from terminal cancer, to kiss the Torah on the holiday.

Rabbi Yona Fradkin, the rav of the shul, was informed of the distressed child's wish and decided to act on it. Sick and dying, the boy's mother was having trouble coping with her hopeless situation. Her holidays were not filled with synagogue prayers, new clothing, and יום טוב food. Her days were rather filled with turning on IV pumps and looking sadly out the window. When the חגים came, rather than feeling happiness and joy, she sank into deeper and deeper depression.

On שמחת תורה, she was sitting in her living room, trying to alleviate the effects of chemotherapy and bed sores when she heard the sound of singing coming from the direction of the shul. A sad smile came to her face as she thought of her precious six-year-old riding on his Abba's shoulders and her joyous nine-year-old dancing in circles. The singing became louder and louder. She closed her eyes and pictured the happy scene.

When she opened her eyes, tears began streaming down her cheeks as she witnessed the whole congregation, men in טליתים, children with flags, women pushing babies in strollers, friends and strangers alike, all marching to her front lawn and dancing the שמחת תורה הקפות right there. She treasured the sight of her six-year-old waving a flag while sitting on a ישיבה בחור's shoulders. It was priceless to see her husband dance with the Torah and smile with the deep joyousness that transcended their family's troubles. Soon, her nine-year-old son came into the house with the biggest and proudest smile that showed his love in the deepest way she had ever felt. Then one by one, her closest friends came in, followed by the rav and the representatives of the shul to wish her a רפואה שלמה, the biggest and most honored get-well wishes in her life, of endless cards of encouragement and support.

And yes, she did kiss the Torah. The festivities returned to shul, but this woman continued to smile and cry tears of joy. Three months later, the woman succumbed to her illness, נבך, but not before she discovered a newfound שמחה that carried her through the last month of her challenges: the שמחה of love and compassion, the שמחה of performing a מצווה, שמחת התורה. May we all hear good things and have a wonderful, good year, מייט געזונט און כח.

