This holiday is the culmination and grand finale of the Joy of Succot.

Simchat Torah means 'the Joy of the Torah'.

But at first glance this doesn't seem to make sense.

First of all why is it called "Happiness OF the Torah" which implies the Torah is happy?! It should be called "Happiness WITH the Torah" or even better: "Happiness of the JEWS".

Secondly, what has the Torah got to do with this holiday more than any other?

Third, the Torah is the infinite wisdom and intelligence of G-d. But on Simchat Torah we don't learn the Torah.... we don't even open the Torah scrolls! All we do is dance with them as they are; wrapped in their decorative coverings.

What is there to be happy about with the Torah?

To understand this here is a story (from "Stories my Grandfather Told Me" vol.2 pg. 51).

This story takes place in the 'Soldiers Synagogue' in a small town somewhere in Czarist Russia around a hundred years ago on Simchat Torah.

There were several Synagogues in this town but the best place to be on Simchat Torah, especially the children, was in this one where the Cantonists danced.

No one rejoiced like the Cantonists.

Cantonists were Jews that had been torn from their parents at an early age and forcefully inducted in the army as a plan to 'convince' them to leave Judaism. It didn't work, as we will see. Very few children actually converted, many more died and those that survived were marred for life.

[Czarist Russia was possibly the most religious nation that ever existed; virtually everyone was insanely Russian Orthodox. except for the Jews]

The dancing and singing were at a wild pace, the men spun, lifted their feet and legs to the rhythm of their own voices as they grasped large cloth- covered Torah Scrolls. They were hoarse from singing, their eyes were closed in ecstatic joy and sweat covered their faces and drenched their jackets and shirts as they danced and sang faster and faster. especially one, who we will call Shimon.

He was perhaps fifty years old and he was jumping and spinning more than anyone else non-stop for a half-hour singing, over the din of the other voices, "Torah, Torah, I love you so! I love you so!"

Finally, out of breath and exhausted, he handed the scroll he was carrying to someone else and sat down. His shirt had torn in the revelry and, unbeknownst to him, it exposed deep scars on his chest that the children immediately noticed.
They gathered around him as he was trying to catch his breath.. a huge smile on his glistening face. and asked him how he got the scars.

"Ahh! These?" He replied "These are my medals of honor!! Ha haa!!"

When he saw that they really wanted to know he became a bit more serious and began, still with a twinkle in his eye, looking from child to child.

"When I was eight years old, something like you children, there was a big meeting of all the Jews in the town in my house that lasted into the night.

My father, of blessed memory, was the Rabbi of the town and he led the meeting. I listened from behind my door which was opened a bit and heard everything.

"It seems that the Czar's soldiers had come earlier that day and demanded that the town produce twenty young men for the army or they would induct everyone, and no one wanted it to be their son.

"The rich people said they would give money, big money to the community if their sons were exempted while the others, my father included, insisted on a fair and equal lottery. It was really serious, there was yelling, even crying and lasted most of the night but finally the lottery idea won.

"I fell asleep after a few hours of their arguing, but suddenly I was awakened by a scream. I knew it was my mother and I understood immediately what had happened. I was one of those chosen!

"My mother came into my room, crying and weeping almost uncontrollably, hugging me and kissing me with no words.

"But I told her, 'Mommy, you don't have to cry. I'll come back . I promise.

You'll see!' But she answered, "Shimon, my beloved son, your soul is more in danger than your body!"

"But I answered, "Mommy, I swear I will always remain a Jew!"

"The next day my father spoke to me for an hour and although he didn't cry at all, I knew that his soul was shattered. And, in fact, he died just a few weeks later, a young man, from a broken heart.

"But a few days later two 'snatchers' came into town and began taking children forcefully from their parents. It seems that the rich people couldn't stand the pain of losing their children and hired them. All the parents tried to hide their children but it didn't work. My mother also hid me in a barrel but they burst into our house, beat my mother and when I jumped out to protect her they took me as well.

"The next day there was a wagon full of us, hands tied to one another like animals with armed guards on horseback around us. But somehow my mother managed to break through, toss me a bag (which I later discovered contained Tefillin and a prayer book and said 'Don't forget the day of your Bar-Mitzva'. Those were the last words I ever heard her say.

"Three years later I was still a year away from my Bar-Mitzva and I had succeeded in keeping my promise to my mother I did not give in to them. But I knew I couldn't hold out much longer. The tortures and punishments they subjected me to were indescribable. I was a leader and an example to the others so they decided that they would put all their efforts in me. I was beaten, starved, deprived of sleep, warm clothing and kept in solitary confinement and as time went on it got worse.

"That's how I got these my 'medals'." He said, touching his chest and continued his story.
"After they had tortured me intensively for several weeks they made a proposition. The general himself was going to visit the camp and if I converted before him they would give me rights, warm bed, good food, a high rank in the army and even let me see my parents again (my father had already passed away, but I didn't know).

"I told them to give me three days to think.

"In those three days they kept up the tortures and didn't let up on me even a bit. Just that the officials kept visiting and promising me, they wanted to be sure that I wasn't going to let them down.

"That night I had a dream. I dreamt that I was in my home town by a river. I was very thirsty and jumped into the river to cool off and to drink when suddenly the current began to draw me down. I fought with all my might but it was a losing battle, I felt that in one second all would be lost. Then, suddenly, I saw a small branch floating on the water and, in desperation I reached for it. As soon as I grabbed it it became the last link of a long chain attached that was to a tree on the dry land. Each link had a Hebrew name on it, on the closest to the tree was written 'Avraham', the one after it, 'Yitzchak' Thousands of links until the one before the one I was holding my father's name, Shlomo and the one in my hand, was written .. My name!

But mine was beginning to . crack!!

"NO, NO, NO!!" I screamed hysterically and woke in a sweat.

When the day came, soldiers came for me, dressed me up and took me, with themselves as an 'honor' guard to the ceremony. There sat the general with royal escorts on all sides.. everyone was smiling.

They presented me as the boy who saw the light and was willing to leave Judaism for the church. All eyes were on me.

I noticed, when they took me on the stage, that the walls were decorated with several pairs of large crossed swords with two smaller swords beneath them.

I reached behind me, pulled one of the smaller swords with its sheath from the wall, drew it from its sheath and declared.

"In the name of his glorious majesty the Czar, this is for the three days I said I would consider changing, G-d forbid, my religion! I am a Jew and I will always be a Jew!! SHEMA YISROEL!! "

"And before they knew what was happening I put the pinky, ring finger and index finger of my left hand on the table before me (careful to hide my middle, Tefillin finger) and, in one powerful move, chopped them off with the sword and held them up for all to see!! I was spraying blood on the pure white uniforms of the officials!

"The crowd let out a gasp. The officials left the room in confusion.. they had suffered a clear defeat by a Jewish boy.

"I don't know how but I didn't die. The bleeding stopped, I got better and even served ten more years in the army until they discharged me. But they never talked to me about religion again.

"I didn't know it at the time but I wasn't the only such story, But I heard that when the Czar Nicholas, may his name be cursed forever, heard what I had done it was the last straw. They knew they were defeated and the entire Cantonist plan was dropped. Thank G-d! NOW. It's Simchas Torah tonight!!

Let's dance!!"
And saying this he leaped up and began dancing again and singing "Sisu V'Shimchu B'Simchas Torah!!"

This answers our questions. When G-d gave the Torah to the Jews He also gave them the power to, not only not be affected by the world, but to transform the entire world for the better. something like how Shimon in our story transformed his scars into 'medals' that changed even the evil Czar of Russia.

This is the Simcha, the Joy and power that is in the Torah. And that is why we rejoice with it wrapped in its covering. because the true Joy of the Torah comes from the infinite G-dly energy contained in it. above and beyond understanding.

And the reason we rejoice in this holiday specifically is because now that we are finishing almost a month of holy holidays and returning to our REAL purpose; changing the world, we need the Torah in order to do it.

Only the Torah has the power and joy necessary to change the world.

But the REAL revelation of the 'Joy of the Torah' will be through Moshiach!

He will bring all the Jews back to the Torah and together we will transform the entire world to one huge, joyous ‘Soldiers Synagogue’ on Simchat Torah.

**Moshiach NOW!!**

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