

I will not share many words with you today, and not simply because of the especially long davening this morning. It is because the Sages treated this day in a similar fashion. Shemini Atzeres is the climax of Succos; it is the climax of Tishrei; it is the climax, in fact, of the entire calendar of yamim tovim. And yet we find precious little about Shemini Atzeres in the classic sources of our Sages. Why is there such relative silence? And what are we to make of the day?

We have spent much time this yom tov season talking about our hearts. And at the end of our Tishrei experience -- after the shofar has been put away, after we have finished saying viduy, after the lulav and hoshanos are put down and, soon, after we take our leave of the succah -- what we are left with is one simple and powerful fact. It is the fact that our hearts are deeply, permanently, eternally connected with Hashem. We are left with the knowledge that we do not need intermediaries, not even our special mitzvos, to carry Hashem with us all the time, to live in His presence and rejoice in who we are. It is not a day to say goodbye to Hashem. It is a day to realize that we never say goodbye.

And that, I think, is why there is so little said about this day. It is not a day for activity -- all the mitzvos of Tishrei have been performed. And it is not a day for too much discussion, either. It is a day just for being with Hashem, a day that foreshadows a world where everything is full of Hashem's presence, a picture of a world that is simply perfect -- and that is the most powerful kind of joy there is.

Tomorrow, we will conclude the Torah, which ends with the letter lamed, and immediately begin at the beginning, which starts with the letter beis. And yes, those two letters spell the word *leiv*, heart. The Torah lives in our heart, which is why we never finish. And Hashem lives in our heart -- הוא לבן של ישראל, which is why we are never separated from him.

If we really appreciated the intense simcha of Shemini Atzeres, we would start dancing together after candle lighting on Shemini Atzeres evening and not stop dancing until someone dragged us into Maariv at the end of Simchas Torah. But if we don't do that, we can do something just as important -- we can take this day to realize that we never say goodbye.

And as we now say Yizkor, we know that those who we love have never really left us either. They live on in our hearts -- they live on in the lessons we learned, in the way we consciously and subconsciously emulate them, live out the values they stood for, and strive to be what they were. We remember them today because they remain a part of our lives, now and always.

I wish all of you a yom tov full of the most special kind of joy. And in this year that has come to be defined by being apart, let us take this day to remember that we are never really apart, not from Hashem and not from each other, and let us hope that this year brings us all together, from the four corners of the earth, to rejoice together with Hashem in His holy city. והביאנו לציון עירך ברנה ולירושלים בית מקדשך בשמחת עולם.