

Shmini Atzeres/Simchas Torah

Remote Youth Groups

September 28-29 2021

Shmini Atzeres

In connection with the festival of Shemini Atzeret (the Eighth Day of Assembly) our sages tell us a fine parable: A king once arranged a great feast and invited his dear princes and princesses to his palace. Having spent several happy days together, the guests prepared to take leave. But the king said to them: "Pray, stay one more day with me, it's hard for me to part with you!"

So it is with us, our Sages conclude the parable. We have spent many happy days in G-d's house - in the synagogue. Some of the worshippers are unfortunately rare visitors. G-d wants to see us an extra day in shul, and so He gave us an extra festival - Shemini Atzeret.

In some congregations it is customary to have *hakafot* on the night of Shemini Atzeret, just like on the following night of Simchat Torah.

We still eat our meals in the sukkah on Shemini Atzeret, though without the blessing "to dwell in the sukkah" (*Leishev basukkah*).

The reading of the Torah during the morning service of Shemini Atzeret is the portion of "Asser Te'asser," dealing with the commandment to give tithes. Sukkot is the Festival of Ingathering (*Chag H'assif*), when the harvest was gathered in from the fields. It was then the time to take off "tithe" in accordance with the commandment of the Torah and to give it to the Levites and the poor.

Simchas Torah

At last comes the most joyous day of all - the day of Simchat Torah rejoicing with the Torah.

After the evening prayer and Kiddush in the synagogue, the *hakafot* are performed by reciting several verses out loud, and taking out all the Torah scrolls from the ark, which are then carried around the Bimah in seven circuits (*hakafot*).

Every one receives the honor of carrying the Torah. In between the *hakafot*, singing and dancing with the Torah is the order of the day. The little boys and girls also join in the celebration and rejoicing, and accompany the procession around the Bimah carrying their *Simchat Torah* banners with a burning candle at the top. Some of these banners are very elaborate, with miniature arks that open and close, and illustrated with pictures of Moses and Aaron and David, all rejoicing with the Torah.

The *hakafot* are repeated again during the morning service, with the same degree of rejoicing. After the *hakafot* three scrolls are taken from the ark for reading. In the first, the last portion of the Torah *Vezoth Haberacha* is read and re-read many times until every one has been called up to the Torah. Then boys who are not yet Bar-mitzvah are called up jointly with a distinguished member of the shul (*Im kol hanearim* — with all the boys). Thereupon the blessing *Hamalach hagoel* (the angel who redeems) with which Jacob blessed Joseph's children, is said on behalf of the boys.

For the concluding portion a distinguished member is called up, and he is called "Bridegroom of the Torah." Another distinguished member is called up for the first portion of Genesis, which is read in the second Torah scroll. He is called "Bridegroom of Genesis." Finally the final portion is called up and the portion is read in the third scroll of the Torah, the Haftorah itself being taken from the first chapter of Joshua, Moses' successor.

Thus, the reading of the Torah goes on portion by portion throughout the year, throughout the ages, in everlasting cycles. The Torah is concluded on *simchat* Torah, but it is also immediately started again from the beginning. This shows that there is no end to the Torah and that it must be read and studied constantly, over and over again. For the Torah, like G-d Himself who gave it to us, is everlasting. By observing it, our people Israel forms the third link in the eternal union between G-d, the Torah and Israel.

Shmini Atzeres ideas and discussion topics

1. The Medrash teaches us that after Klal Yisroel spent the whole Succos living with Hashem and left their permanent houses to enter a temporary Succah and they celebrated their relationship with Hashem, Hashem says to Klal Yisroel, "It is hard on me that you are leaving, stay one more day," and that is why we keep Shmini Atzeres.

Does Hashem really need us to stay with Him? What is going on here?

2. Why is Simchas Torah celebrated on this Chag of Shmini Atzeres?

3. We are taught that we bring Korbanos for the 70 nations throughout the holiday of Succos, and on Shmini Atzeres, we bring only one Korban for Klal Yisroel. So this Chag is really about our relationship with God.

4. Simchas Torah is our celebration with the Torah – what does the Torah mean to us? Is it really relevant today?

5. What do we celebrate on Simchas torah, not the giving of the Torah, because that is Shavuous, so what do we celebrate now?

6. The end of the Torah has Moshe's death. It is considered to be the end of an era. What is different after Moshe's death?

7. Shmini Atzeres is a Yom Tov without any mitzvos associated with it. We don't have a mitzvah to sit in a Succah or eat Matzah or blow shofar. What other Yom Tov has that characteristic? The idea behind this is as we have mentioned, the Mitzvah of the Yom Tov is just to spend time with Hashem.

8. They used to finish the Torah only once every three years, when was Simchas Torah then?

Laws of Shmini Atzeres

We say a new bracha Shehechyanu for Shmini Atzeres, because it a new Yom Tov, not connected to Sukkos.

We say Hallel on Shmini Atzeres and there is Birchat Kohanim. The Shemone Esray is for Yom Tov.

We are not obligated to eat in the Sukkah on Shmini Atzeres, but there are different minhagim about it (some do eat, some make Kiddush)

Shmini Atzeres is a yom tov, so carrying is permitted, as is cooking, but one is not allowed to light a new fire (any fire must be lit from an existing flame)

VeZos Habracha Summary

The *parshah* of V'Zot Haberacha, the final *parshah* in the Torah, is read on Simchas Torah. The name of the *parshah* means "and this is the blessing" because in it, Moses blesses the tribes of Israel before he passes away. Each tribe get its own blessing, just like Jacob blessed each tribe individually.

Reuven is blessed with life, Judah with success in battle, Levi with serving in the Temple and being teachers of Torah, Benjamin is "beloved" by G-d, Joseph is blessed with sweet fruits on his land, Zebulun with success in trade, Issachar with success in Torah study, Gad with a lot of land, Dan with the might of a lion, Naftali with fertile land and sea, and Asher with sons and olive oil.

After Moses finishes blessing the people of Israel, he goes up Mount Nebo and G-d shows him the whole Land of Israel. Then Moses, at 120 years old, passes away. He is buried by G-d, and until today, nobody knows his burial place. The Jews mourn Moses for thirty days, and then Joshua becomes the new leader, and all the Jews follow and respect him just as they did Moses.

The *parshah*, and the entire Torah, ends by telling us what a great person Moses was: "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom G-d knew face to face... and in all the mighty hand and the great awesome things which Moses did before the eyes of all Israel."

As soon as we finish reading the *parshah*, we immediately begin again from the beginning, reading from Bereishit about how G-d created the world.