

CHAG SAME'ACH. These days are the 22nd and 23rd of Tishrei 5782, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. On Shemini Atzeret we say Hallel, read from two Sifrei Torah, and say Yizkor. Mussaf includes the duchen. On Simchat Torah we will duchen during Shacharit and observe the regular customs of Simchat Torah.

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THE PRAYER FOR RAIN, GESHEM

Each year on Shemini Atzeret the chazzan chants a special liturgical poem which invokes the memories of the Patriarchs and biblical leaders, all using the context of water. Avraham "followed [God] like rain," Yitzchak was born after Avraham told the angels "let you take a bit of water," etc. While each stanza refers to water in a positive tone, the final stanza takes a darker direction in asking Hashem to remember the twelve tribes of Yisrael who passed through the waters of Yam Suf, the Sea of Reeds. The poet adds: "to their offspring whose blood was spilt for you like water, turn to us – for woes engulf our souls like water." The water we pray for is the water of blessing. Water can also create devastation as in the cases of drowning and harsh storms like hurricanes. Our Sukkot holiday is usually tainted by excessive rain, reminding us that not all rain can be a blessing. We recognize this in the context of this poem that we pray for the brachah of rain, and not the devastation that can come about through excessive rain. May Hashem respond to our prayers.

SHEMINI ATZERET

With this holiday we exit the Sukkah which has dominated our living quarters for the past week. Rav Soloveitchik wrote as follows:

The individual, indeed mankind as a whole, sits at a small, insignificant booth. He thinks his little booth is the whole world; there is nothing beyond his own little universe. Man's principle interests usually are concentrated around his family. He has no intellectual connection to the rest of the world. What does he know about the world outside his natural boundary? What does modern man know about the secrets of nature and the mysteries of life? *"Do you believe that by acquiring knowledge you have learned all there is to know?"* (Job 38:18) We have a false perception about the heights that modern science has reached. In reality the greater the scientist the more honest he will be in stating how little we truly know about the secrets of life and nature. No matter how much we progress we will never discover the secret of creation. Even the great telescopes that peer into the distant corners of the universe offer us no greater insights into the greatness of Hashem than a small booth, a Sukkah. In the final analysis man sits cramped in a

tiny Sukkah. Man would do well to understand that outside his small, familiar Sukkah is a great infinite world, a world that he knows nothing about and will never comprehend.

Asser T'Asser

We are commanded to make sure that we give the tithing that the Torah expects of us. Usually this extended reading of the end of Re'eh is read only on the last days of the Pilgrimage Festivals when it coincides on Shabbat. The exception is Shemini Atzeret. That is because in origin the Torah tells us that Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret are linked to the plentiful bounty that makes the nation happy in harvesting all the fruits and crops that Hashem has blessed us with. Hence, even when it is not Shabbat, we should be reminded of our responsibility of giving tzedakah and taking care of people less fortunate than we. It is a good reminder for us during the end of the holiday season to take stock of where we are financially and to make sure that our tzedakah obligations are considered as a high priority in setting goals for the year. We take care of our families first and foremost, but we can never reject the overtures made by those who approach us for needy funds. Many people who do not have the necessities of life approach us during the year on a regular basis. We must always make sure that they are considered high on our priority list so that we could really enjoy with a clear heart and conscience how Hashem has blessed us.

V'Samachta

You Shall Be Happy In Your Holiday

With this statement at the end of the Torah reading of Shemini Atzeret, we realize the responsibility that we have to take care of our family, making sure that the rejoicing is at a proper level. Our Sages in the Talmud (Pesachim 109a) state that a man is obligated to make his wife and children happy during the festival as it is recorded. How does he do this? The men are happy with wine, women with gifts of new clothing. The Yerushalmi adds that we should make sure that our children receive gifts of nuts (and other sweet delicacies) in order to enhance these days as days of joy. As we see from the Talmudic text, each person's gifts are personalized to remind us that everybody is not the same, men, women and children. It's true on an individual level as well, and we should make sure the mandate of being happy receives our attention. Sometimes the holidays become burdensome because of the loss of income and work time. We should never look at these holidays as a burden, but truly a time of family rejoicing. As the holidays come to a close, we renew the family connections that are sometimes taken for granted throughout the year with those family members who are present, and those who live out of town.

SIMCHAT TORAH

Moshe's Blessing

In the brachot that Moshe gives the tribes of Israel before he dies, he mentions the relationship between Zevulun and Yissachar, "rejoice Zevulun when you go out, and Yissachar in your tents" (33:18). Zevulun were the merchants and tradesmen, and they had a relationship that they developed with their brothers of the tribe of Yissachar who were totally in Torah study. In fact our Sages tell us that there were over 200 leaders of the Sanhedrin that came from the tribe of Yissachar alone. Moshe was promising them that as long as they would maintain that partnership with Yissachar, Zevulun would be guaranteed of being successful in all their business endeavors. That is why, says the Kli Yakar, Moshe told them that unlike other business people who do not celebrate until they return from business trips, you can celebrate when you go out on the business trip because you are assured of success. Your assurance emanates from your relationship with your brother Yissachar. As long as they are in the tents of Torah studying, then Zevulun will be assured of success in business.

Moshe's Burial Place

"And no man knew his burial place until this day" (34:6). The Talmud (Sotah 14a) relates that when the Romans sought to locate Moshe's grave, they were unsuccessful, for when they ascended the mountain it appeared as if he were buried below them; while when they went to the bottom of the mountain, his grave seemed to be on top of the mountain. This Talmudic statement begs for a novel interpretation. The Yalkut Sofer interprets this Midrash homiletically. Moshe Rabbeinu represents the entire Jewish nation, and his fate is the fate of the people.

Throughout the generations the other nations of the world have utilized two methods in their attempts to destroy the Jewish people. The first method was to treat the Jews favorably in the hope that they would assimilate with their gentile neighbors, and thereby lose their identity as a nation of Hashem. The second method was to persecute and torture them through terrible decrees and by inciting pogroms to physically eradicate Bnei Yisrael. Try as they might, both methods have proven to be unsuccessful. When the non-Jews adopted the position of raising the status of the Jewish people and giving them prestige and honor, they realized that this method would not succeed, so they changed their tactics and began oppressing them. However, this method also failed. After degrading and persecuting them, they thought that perhaps they should once again change their plan and elevate the Jews.

The upshot is no man knows Moshe's burial place until this very day. No-one has, or ever will be able to bury Klal Yisrael. Bnei Yisrael remain a vibrant and thriving people eternally. This is, in essence, the divine promise of Netzach Yisrael – the eternity of the Jewish people.

Which tribe did Moshe not bless, and why? (Hint: think sin of Pe'or.)

Chatan Torah

One time a very boorish and ignorant Jewish person paid an enormous amount of money to buy for himself the honor of Chatan Torah, to be the bridegroom of the Torah for the Simchat Torah services. The chuppah is created by an outstretched tallit. When the rabbi noticed who the Torah's bridegroom was, his comment was: This man is an extremely religiously observant Chatan because he hasn't seen the Kallah for an entire year!

HAFTORAH

The Haftorah for Simchat Torah is the first chapter of the Book of Yehoshua. It would seem that this is unlike many of the other Haftarot of the year where the sought-after theme in Prophets is an echo of the theme of the Torah reading of that morning. In this case it seems to be the continuity of the next chapter in TaNaCH. Moshe dies, Yehoshua takes over. Another way of looking at this, of course, is that Moshe was the first King of Israel, and Yehoshua had the halachah of a King of Israel as well. Both are the only ones referred to as servants of Hashem. The Rambam explicitly states that a person who rebels against the king is culpable for capital punishment, and he derives it from the verse at the end of this Haftorah. The most important aspect is that the life of Torah for the Jewish people continued after Moshe's death. Yehoshua was not only an arch disciple, but he was the successor who was able to lead the Jewish people as if they were still basking in the shadow of Moshe Rabbeinu. (RED)

YOM TOV HALACHAH

With the Sukkah and the Four Species behind us, we focus on this holiday as a pure Yom Tov. What I mean by that is that it is a Yom Tov without tangible physical symbols. Like Shavuot, the Torah itself is the symbol of this holiday. Sukkot and Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, and even Yom Kippur, have other types of symbols. The only symbol that is reserved for this holiday and for Shavuot is the Torah itself. The Torah is taken out, and any time the Torah is taken out of the Ark, it should be read from and not just merely danced with. Consequently Simchat Torah night is the only night that we have a public reading of the Torah. When is the other time at night that we take out a Sefer Torah, but we do not read from it? (Hint: Think of a big crowd all dressed in white.)