

Good Shabbos and good Yom Tov, everyone.

Thank you to the sponsors of today's drasha:

- Yehuda and Geoula Cahn, in memory of Geoula's mother, Aviva Elalouf, Aviva bas Shlomo, whose yahrtzeit is the 23<sup>rd</sup> of Tishrei.
- Todd Heller and Ruth Klein, in Memory of Todd's father, Arthur Heller, whose yahrtzeit is the 25<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei, October 13.

May the neshamos have an aliya, and may the sponsors be rewarded for their generosity and support of the Shul with much bracha and hatzlacha and good health!

I hope you will all join us tonight and tomorrow for exciting and lively *kumzitz* style *hakafos* in the tent! The *hakafos* will be different than in other years, but they will reflect the same intense and passionate *kavod HaTorah*.

Just as Neilah represents the end of Yom Kippur, the Yom Tov of Shmini Atzeres represents the end of the Yomim Noraim season. It encapsulates all our growth and hard work over the past year, especially over the past three weeks since Rosh Hashana.

In the Torah, this Yom Tov, the eighth day of Sukkos, is called Atzeres—stopping or detaining.

ויקרא פרק כג פסוק לו  
שבעת ימים תקריבו אשה ליקוק ביום השמיני מקרא  
קדש יהיה לכם והקרבתם אשה לה' עצרת הוא כל מלאכת עבדה לא תעשו:

**Rashi** explains the origin of this name based on a well-known **Medrash**:

רש"י ויקרא (כ"ג: ל"ו)  
עצרת היא, עצרתי אתכם אצלי כמלך שזימן את בניו לסעודה לכך וכך ימים כיון שהגיע זמנו להפטר אמר בני בבקשה מכם  
עכבו עמי עוד יום אחד קשה עלי פרידתכם.

Hashem told the Jewish people: Like a King who invited his children to a feast for several days and, when it was time to leave, he said, "*Please stay just one more day. Your parting is just too difficult for me.*"

This **Medrash** leaves us with a glaring question. What does this extra day accomplish?

Doesn't it just delay the inevitable? And wouldn't an extra day together just make the eventual parting even more difficult?

The sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, **Rav Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson**, points out that the Medrash uses the word פרידתכם, meaning your parting, rather than פרידתנו our parting.

He explains that it is not a mutual parting. Only we take leave, as God remains connected to us forever—with an eternal bond of love. From His vantage point, there is never any parting.

שלחן שבת עמ' 341  
ענין זה מעורר שאלה בסיסית: במה מסייע החג הנוסף להתגבר על קושי הפרידה. הרי גם כך תגיע בסופו של דבר עת הפרידה? וכי כל המטרה היא לדחות את הפרידה ביום נוסף? עלינו לומר אפוא, שעל ידי החג הנוסף אכן לא תהיה פרידה. הדבר יובן לאור דיוק הלשון של המדרש "קשה עלי פרידתכם"—לכוארה היה צריך להיאמר "פרידתנו" ולא פרידתכם" אלא בכך רומז לנו הקב"ה שמצידו אין שום פירוד הוא נשאר תמיד קשור עמנו בקשר של אהבה אין סופית כל האפשרות לפירוד היא פרידתכם שאנחנו מפנים - לו עורף ונפרדים ממנו. על כך אומר הקב"ה ש"קשה" עליו ההיפרדות הזאת שלנו ממנו, ולכן הוא מבקש שנעשה עמו חג נוסף, שימנע את הפרידה.

**קשה עלי פרידתכם** Hashem says—it is difficult to watch us taking leave from Him, when, in truth, **we do not have to leave**. That **closeness doesn't have to end**, the relationship can continue—but **only if we take certain steps**...and that is what the extra day is meant to accomplish...

שפת אמת תקל"ה:

והיו הדברים האלה כו', לבבך—הוא בר"ה ועשי"ת, שבנ"י שבים וחפצים לשעבד גם מחשבות הרעות להשי"ת, וזהו בשני יצריך. נפשך—הוא ביוה"כ ועניתם את נפשותיכם. מאודך—הוא בסוכות זמן האסיף, באספך כו' ואעפ"כ מניחין כל מאודיהם לישב בדירת ארעי ולחסות בצלו ית'. ואח"כ והיו הדברים האלה, כו' על לבבך שאח"כ יכול אדם לקבל דברי תורה בלבו והוא שמיני עצרת לעצור ולקבל הארת התורה בעומק הלב.

The **Sefas Emes** explains that three phrases in the first paragraph of Krias Shema refer to the Yamim Tovim we just celebrated and a fourth phrase refers to Shmini Atzeres.

[First] **ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך**—love Hashem with all your heart--is a reference to Rosh Hashana and the Aseres Yemei Teshuva. That's when we strive to be *mamlach* Hashem, to accept Him as our King.

[Next] **בכל נפשך**—love Hashem with all your soul--is a reference to Yom Kippur. That's when the Torah says *v'inisem es nafshoseichem*, afflict your soul.

[Third] **ובכל מאודך**—and love Hashem with all your possessions--is a reference to Sukkos. That's when we leave our comfortable homes, as directed by Hashem.

[Finally] The next pasuk begins with the statement: **והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך**—these matters should “be on your hearts,” meaning that they must penetrate our hearts and minds, until they are literally a part of us.

This, says the **Sefas Emes**, is a reference to Shmini Atzeres.

As **Rabbeinu Bachai** writes: the love of Hashem must be engraved on our hearts.

רבינו בחיי דברים פרק ו

(ו) והיו הדברים האלה. היחוד ואהבה שהזכיר יהיו חקוקים על לבבכם,

And that is the goal of one more day together, as it were, to internalize everything we have worked on for the past month. Our goal should be to focus on our relationship and connection with Hashem, to nurture it, so that it will stay with us in the weeks and months ahead.

How can we accomplish this? What tools are we given for this purpose?

The Torah teaches us that during the seven days of Sukkos **והיית אך שמח**, “you should be only, or completely happy.”

תלמוד בבלי מסכת פסחים דף עא עמוד א

והיית אך שמח - לרבות לילי יום טוב האחרון לשמחה

The Gemara in **Pesachim 71a** writes that the phrase “you should be **completely** happy” teaches, *derech drush*, the idea of the *mitzva* of *simcha* on Shmini Atzeres, the eighth day of Sukkos.

The **Vilna Gaon** asks: How can the word *ach--only--*which usually is used as limit be understood here as the source of an additional obligation, the *mitzvah* of *simcha* on Shmini Atezres?

He answers that the limit is being placed on the externalities--the physical props, namely the arba minim and the sukka, we used on the Yom Tov of Sukkos.

אכין ורקין מיעוטא הן, ואיך למדה הגמ' מ"אך שמח" לרבות ליל יו"ט אחרון לשמחה? ותיירץ "אך שמח" באמת מיעוט הוא, היינו למעט יו"ט אחרון מכלי מצווה אלא יש בו אך ורק שמחה ולכן בשמיני עצרת זמן שמחתנו יש בו רק מצות שמחה, שמחה הנובעת מתוך דביקות בתורה שאינה זקוקה לכלי מצוה.

In this way, Shmini Atzeres—true to its name “*atzeres*”—is a day of stopping. We **stop** taking the lulav and esrog, and, if we lived in Israel we would **stop** sitting in the sukka. Consequently, the only *mitzva* left for Shmini Atzeres is *simcha*, to be happy. There are intentionally no tools or props for this day.

Today, we intentionally **stop doing** things and, instead, we try to **experience** *simcha*, joy, in its purest form—**connecting to God, without any physical aids. It is simply a state of being with God, which produces a state of inner joy, true simcha.** The Vilna Gaon continues: *Simcha* that involves no tangible supports is, therefore, manifested **through דביקות בתורה**, which explains why Simchas Torah is celebrated on this day.

This past year, due to the Covid19 pandemic, many things have stopped. We have stopped many external expressions of our routine lives. For many months we stopped coming to shul. Schools stopped functioning in the regular fashion. We have stopped hosting guests in our homes. And through it all, we were forced to strengthen ourselves and our relationship to Hashem. But the lesson of Shmini Atzeres is that, ultimately, togetherness with Hashem transcends any specific actions... רחמנא ליבא בעי. Hashem wants our hearts. And real relationships can transcend any physical limits and borders.

Similarly, this year the customary dancing on Simchas Torah is, unfortunately, not an option—but the emotions will be there...and will find expression.

So, what is Shmini Atzeres about? What are we to do on this day of togetherness with Hashem?

It is a day to **appreciate** Hashem... to truly internalize the privilege of being His people...and a day to feel a sense of love for Hashem. And if we can truly feel Hashem's sense of love for us and feel our sense of love toward Him, the פרידה, the **departure** can be **suspended**...

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the secular government decreed a limit to the Torah study in Yeshivas Volozhin. In response, Gedolei Torah convened a meeting to consider how to respond. **Rav Itzele Ponovezher** stood up and said “*Gentlemen, before we try to convince others, we, must feel the love we must have for Hashem and His Torah.*”

He said we must internalize what we proclaim every day, before Krias Shema:

**אהבה רבה אהבתנו**, ה' אלקינו, חמלה גדולה ויתרה חמלת עלינו אבינו מלכנו... ותן בלבנו בינה להבין ולהשכיל לשמוע ללמוד וללמד לשמור ולעשות ולקיים את כל דברי תלמוד תורתך **באהבה** והאר עיניו בתורתך ודבק לבנו במצותיך ויחד לבבנו **לאהבה** וליראה את שמך.

*With abundant love have You loved us, Hashem our God; with overwhelming compassion have you dealt with us. . . Our Father, merciful Father, have mercy upon us, instilling in our hearts the will to understand and to elucidate, to listen, to learn and teach, to observe and fulfill all the words of Your Torah's teaching with love. Enlighten our eyes with Your Torah, attach our hearts to your commandments, and unify our hearts to love and revere Your Name.*

That is a goal of Simchas Torah—**To fully appreciate our relationship with Hashem through His Torah, and strengthen that relationship.**

And, therefore, Shmini Atzeres, the high point in our relationship, is the Yom Tov of pure *simcha*—which is the essence of *avodas Hashem*. As stated in *Tehillim*, chapter 100, עבדו את ה' בשמחה, “serve Hashem with joy.” This is what we have worked so hard to accomplish.

It is the climax of weeks of effort—to reexamine our priorities—to distinguish what is real from that which is only an illusion...and to feel the need expressed in *Tehillim*, chapter 27, 'שבתי בבית ה' כל ימי חיי, “to dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life.” And **now** we are ready to celebrate what we cherish and value—with pure *simcha*. **Now** we are ready to spend time being with Hashem—taking the emotion of Neila, which culminated with the statement of ה' הוא האלקים and which took root in the Sukka, where for seven days we lived in a state of awareness of God’s presence.

למען תדעו דורותיכם כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל...אני ה' אלקיכם—*so that future generations know that I housed you in Sukkos when I took you out of Mitzrayim, I am Hashem your God.*

This level of “*daas*” as **Rav Soloveitchik** described in *Al Hateshuva* is defined not a one-time event—not just an idea—but an experience and a relationship that is always there.

במונח "לידע" הכוונה לתודעה מתמדת, להכרה תמידית שהאמונה באלקים תהיה לאדם בבחינת זיקה שאינה פוסקת. . . מציאות חיה שאינה יכול להסיר דעתו ממנה אפילו למחצית הדקה. . .

A deep and genuine connection to Hashem that is not up for discussion—not debatable—simply the way it is; a part of who we are.

This connection should bring about *simcha* on an even higher level. **Rav Hirsch** writes that the *simcha* on Shmini Atzeres is the knowledge that—no matter what—we always have the Torah, which connects us to Hashem directly.

רש"ר הירש ויקרא פרשת אמור פרק כג פסוק יח

ובשמיני – עצרת היא דבקה בה', שמחה בשמחת התורה – אפילו ניטל ממנה ביתה ורכושה.

Even in times of distress, or maybe especially in times of distress, we always have the Torah to connect to Hashem.

And this brings a sense of **simcha** and closeness to Hashem that helps us transmit our *mesorah* to future generations, so that Torah will live on and the Jewish people will live on. When we rejoice on Simchas Torah, we bring the entire experience of the Yamim Noraim with us: The coronation and judgment of Rosh Hashana, the atonement of Yom Kippur, and the joy of Sukkos. But now it all comes together. These are all elements of one story, the story of the Jewish people in every generation...

We celebrate the Torah—our secret of transcendence—because that is what makes us an eternal nation...we hold it close. We know that future generations will cherish it only if we cherish it.

We are about to recite Yizkor. We think of loved ones who are no longer here...the lives they lived, the values they represented ...how they influenced us, changed us, and inspired us...and how we must carry on their legacy. We remember them now and think about how their inspiration is an inseparable part of who we are—their impact on us is forever there—a piece of our hearts we carry with us throughout our lives. Their memory also reminds us that we must carry on. May their memory continue to guide us and inspire us through the coming years.

May this season of intense *avodas Hashem* inspire us for a year of spiritual growth, and may we all be *zoche* to see an end to this *mageifa* soon, and the return of the Beis Hamikdash, *bimhera viyameinu*...and may we merit a year of good health, peace, and *bracha* and *hatzlacha* for all of us, and all our fellow Jews in Israel and throughout the world...amen.