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THANK YOU HASHEM!



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לזכות עלקא דבורה בת מרים רבקה חנה



ויחי

מחנה

One More Day Together



R' Chaim Davies

I'll admit it: I have a soft spot for the underappreciated Yamim Tovim. Shemini Atzeres is one of our *moadim* which is often overlooked and not given the credit it is due. Following in the footsteps of Sukkos, and dressed in the customary festivities of Simchas Torah, it's easy to never realize that there is something different going on — something very special indeed.

Chazal, however, saw it very differently. The *Gemara* (*Chagigah* 17a) tells us that the eighth day is a *regel bifnei atzmo* — a Yom Tov standing entirely on its own, with its own unique light to usher into our lives.

The *Medrash* (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 7:2) draws a direct parallel between the seven days of Sukkos culminating in Shemini Atzeres and the seven days of Pesach culminating, seven weeks later, in

It is at this precise moment that Hashem turns to us and says: “Don’t leave yet. Stay one more day. Just be with Me a little longer.”

— Shemini Atzeres weighs out equal to the day of Kabbalas HaTorah!

The parallel runs deeper. Just as Shavuot is linked to Pesach by seven weeks of gradual development through the Omer, each week corresponding to a different *Sefirah*, so is Shemini Atzeres linked to Sukkos by seven days of development through the *Ushpizin* — as we ascend, day by day, from finding our happiness in the physical realm towards something that lies altogether beyond it.

Shavuot — which is precisely why Chazal call both of those days *Atzeres*. From this, Rabbeinu Bachya (*Kad HaKemach*, *Atzeres*) arrives at a startling conclusion: **הא למדת ששמיני של חג זה שקול כיום מתן תורה**

This is clearly a high-voltage day. But what is it all about?

The *Medrash (Tanchuma, Pinchas 16)* offers a beautiful analogy. Imagine a king who invites the entire kingdom to a massive banquet. As the party winds down and the last few guests don their coats and leave, the king collapses onto his couch, remaining at home with his close family. “You know what?” says the king. “We’ve been so busy with everyone else until now — let’s spend some quality time together, just you and me! Nothing fancy, no ceremonials — just a light, intimate meal together with my loved ones.”

During the times of the *Beis HaMikdash*, Klal Yisroel would bring a total of seventy bull *korbanos* — and, according to the *Gemara (Sukkah 55b)*, these offerings corresponded to the seventy primal nations of the world. Astoundingly, during Sukkos we also focus on tending to the spiritual needs of humankind at large; the *Beis HaMikdash* is, after all, a **בית תפלה לכל העמים**, a house of prayer for all of the nations.

But then comes Shemini Atzeres, and we would bring just one korban — a single bull; corresponding, according to the *Gemara*, to Klal Yisroel. **פר יחיד** — a singular bull, for the singular nation.

Rashi (*Bamidbar 29:36*), commenting on that single bull, gives us the phrase which, in a nutshell, defines the entire day:

לשון חבה הוא זה, בבנים הנפטרים מאביהם והוא אומר להם: קשה עלי פרדתכם, עכבו עוד יום אחד

This is an expression of affection, like children taking leave of their father, and he says to them: your parting is difficult for Me — stay one more day.

You see, we have been drawing close to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* for almost two months now. Through *Chodesh Elul* we sought Him out; on Rosh Hashanah we crowned Him as our King; on Yom Kippur we stepped clean out of this world; and then, for a full week, we moved out of our comfortable homes and into a fragile little hut to share a space with Him.

If Shemini Atzeres is Hashem saying, “It’s hard to see you depart”, Simchas Torah is Klal Yisroel replying, “Eibishter, for us it’s inconceivable!”

And now it is drawing to a close, and ahead of us lies the long, dark, dormant stretch of winter, when the season of closeness quietly slips into our memories.

It is at that precise moment that Hashem turns to us and says: not yet. Stay one more day.

Nothing fancy — no lulav, no sukkah, no *mitzvas hayom*; none of the trappings. Just be with Me a little longer.

Notice what’s absent from Shemini Atzeres. Every other Yom Tov provides us an action, a mitzvah through which we encounter Hashem; Shemini Atzeres (like Shavuot) asks of us nothing at all, because on this day the encounter isn’t mediated by a deed. Rav Tzadok HaKohen puts it beautifully: the joy of this day comes not from doing something which Hashem commanded, but from being *davuk* to that unextinguishable *nekudah* of connection with Hashem which lies at the core of every Yid (*Pri Tzaddik, Sukkos 43*).

Shemini Atzeres is a Yom Tov dedicated to realizing that we are in a loving, personal relationship with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* — He wants us.

Everything until now has been Hashem reaching towards us. But Klal Yisroel, it turns out, had something to say in return. For seven days we rejoice, seeking to find Hashem’s presence within the physical. On the eighth day, we discover what we have been ascending towards all along: we reach for the Torah, take it in our arms, and passionately commit never to let go.

Simchas Torah is, by the standards of our *mesorah*, a very young institution. In Talmudic times, the Torah reading cycle was completed once in three years, not annually (*Megillah 29b*) — and the name Simchas Torah doesn’t even appear in writing until the Machzor Vitry in the eleventh century! Yet it

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has effectively overtaken the biblical Yom Tov on which it sits. What's the *penimiyus* of that?

Here's the clincher: Simchas Torah is Klal Yisroel's reply to Hashem's request for Shemini Atzeres.

If Shemini Atzeres is Hashem saying, "It's hard to see you depart", Simchas Torah is Klal Yisroel replying, "Eibishter, for us it's *inconceivable!*" We excitedly take the Sifrei Torah and dance with them deep into the night, and then we open them up again at Bereishis, immediately, so that not a single moment passes in which we are not engrossed in her light. The Tur (*Orach Chaim* 669) explains that this is why we begin again straight away: so that nobody can claim that Klal Yisroel finished the Torah and walked away from it.

On Simchas Torah we dance with the Torah at our center and no destination anywhere in sight – spinning until the *sefer* in our arms and the arms wrapped around it are no longer entirely distinguishable from one another.

Simchas Torah is a live-action expression of **ישראל אורייתא** וקודשא בריך הוא חד הוא – *The Jewish people, HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and the Torah are one* (*Zohar Acharei Mos* 73a). We enact this with our bodies: dancing in concentric circles with the Torah at the center and no destination anywhere in sight – spinning until the *sefer* in our arms and the arms wrapped around it are no longer entirely distinguishable from one another.

The Ramban writes in his Hakdama to Chumash that the whole of the Torah is composed of the Names of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. To hold a Sefer Torah against your chest is to hold tight to your Beloved. That is the type of simcha which can last the entire year; as the Shem MiShmuel writes, **שמחה זו נותנת כח לכל השנה** (*Simchas Torah* 5672).

The opportunity here is massive. If this is the day when *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* expresses His deepest will to be one with us, then today we are in a private audience with Hashem. Think of what that implies. Listen to the words of the *Zohar HaKadosh* (*Tzav* 31b):

בהוא חדוותא לא משתכחי במלכא אלא ישראל בלחודייהו. ומאן דיתיב עם מלכא, ונטל ליה בלחודיה, כל מה דבעי שאיל, ויהיב ליה.

In that joy, none are found together with the King but Yisroel alone. And one who sits with the King and has Him all to himself – whatever he wishes, he asks, and He gives it to him.

Every day since Elul began, we've been saying **אחת שאלתי** that there is truly only one thing that I seek, Hashem: **שבתי בבית ד' כל ימי חיי** – that I may dwell in Your house all the days of my life. Shemini Atzeres is the day this entire season has been building towards; it's the day when Hashem says yes to our *bikush*, and when our dreams can become a reality.

Hashem, don't let these be our last moments of closeness together. Permanently establish Your *Dirah b'Tachtonim* right here among us. Come home.

May we all seize the opportunity to rejoice with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* for one final day of this Yom Tov season, and truly internalize Hashem's love for us, and our love for Hashem. May the feelings which take root on Shemini Atzeres give us the energy to forge upwards and onwards for the rest of the year. 👑

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