

Shemini Atzeret - Simchat Torah 5778, 2017:

Shemini Atzeret and Hashem's Love

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, the *refuah shlaimah* of Shoshana Elka bat Etel Dina, Devorah bat Chana, Chaya Mindel bat Leah Basha and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Shemini Atzeret occurs at the end of Succot. As *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah* notes, however, it is a *chag bifnei atzmo* (festival in its own right), rather than a part of Succot. (100:7) This is clearly indicated in the Torah's introduction to the unique sacrifice for this day, wherein the following formulation is found: "The eighth day shall be a restriction for you; you shall not do any laborious work." (*Bamidbar* 29:35, translation, *Artscroll Chumash*). This verse stands in stark contrast to the preceding *pasukim* (verses) that refer to the Intermediate Days of Succot (*Chol HaMoed*) and, therefore, deploy the expression, "And on day..." indicating they are a continuation of the first day of the festival.

In *Sefer Vayikra* 23:36 and *Sefer Bamidbar* 29:35, the term, "the eighth day," is coupled with the expression "*Atzeret*." Rashi (1040-1105), in his gloss on our verse from *Sefer Vayikra*, provides us with a particularly famous and fascinating metaphoric explication of the term "*Atzeret*" that is partially based upon *Talmud Bavli*, *Succah* 55b:

[What does "Atzeret" mean?] I [Hashem] will keep you back with Me [one more day]. This is similar to the case of a king who invited his children to a banquet for a certain number of days. When the time arrived for them to take their leave he said: "My children, I beg of you, stay one more day with me; your departure is so difficult for me!"

Rashi is homiletically teaching us a profound lesson: *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* (the Holy One Blessed be He) passionately loves us. Moreover, like the earthly king, the King of Kings has just “spent” a number of days with us wherein we have dedicated ourselves to His service. We have rejoiced in our *succot*, and sung *Hallel* with our *lulav* and *etrog*. We have had beautiful festive meals and inspiring *tefilot* (prayers). Yet, our Creator wants more of us. He wants to rejoice with us one day more in order to strengthen the unique bond that exists between us.

We do not have to wait, however, for the arrival of Shemini Atzeret to feel Hashem’s love surrounding us. If we are sensitive to the daily words of the *tefilot*, and carefully concentrate upon their sublime meaning, we can readily hear the message of G-d’s powerful devotion to us. The first morning *tefilah* that we encounter that explicitly describes Hashem’s affection for us is that of the second *bracha* (blessing) prior to the recitation of the *Shema*. It begins with the words “*Ahavah rabbah*,” and states: “With an abundant love have You loved us, Hashem, our G-d...” It concludes with: “Blessed are You Hashem, Who chooses His people Israel with love.” (Translation, *Artscroll Siddur*) Significantly, the text does not state “Who chose His people Israel with love,” which would have referred to an historical choice lost long ago in the distant sands of time. Instead, our Sages formulated the prayer in the present tense, i.e., Hashem continuously chooses us in love. This illustrates the tremendous depth of care and concern our Creator has for us.

Two explicit statements of Hashem’s depth of connection to us are found in the *Amidah* (*Shmoneh Esrei*). In the very first *bracha* we encounter the phrase “*l’ma’an sh’mo b’ahavah*” (“for His Name’s sake, with love”). In the blessing known as “*Re’tzeh*”, we find

the phrase: “*u'tefilatom b'ahavah tikabale b'ratzon*” (“and their prayer accept with love and favor.”) In sum, if we but listen to what we are saying in our prayers on a daily and ongoing basis, we will sense Hashem’s love enveloping us. Little wonder, then, that *Megillat Shir HaShirim* is the ultimate metaphor for the relationship that obtains between Hashem and the Jewish people.

Shemini Atzeret’s message of G-d’s love for us, as reflected, as well, in the words of our *tefilot*, is a crucial one indeed. It teaches us that we are not alone; for no matter how difficult our daily struggles may be, Hashem is ever our beloved soulmate who continually searches for us in order to bestow His love upon us. In a world that is so often frightening and alienating, this is a message that we continually need to hear. May it be Hashem’s will that we will ever be deserving of His devotion and everlasting love. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom and *Chag Sameach!*

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha’s name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd>

*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on this link: <http://bit.ly/2jrPl2V>.