

Shemini Atzeret, 5781, 2020:

*The Essence of Shemini Atzeret*

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 Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah, Dovid Shmuel ben Chasiyah and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The Torah provides us with the general outlines of *Chag Shemini Atzeret* in three *pasukim*:

[For] a seven-day period, you shall bring a fire offering to the L-rd. On the eighth day, it shall be a *mikra kodesh* — holy occasion for you, and you shall bring a fire offering to the L-rd. It is a [day of] *atzeret* — assembly; you shall not perform any work of labor. (*Sefer Vayikra* 23:36)

The eighth day shall be a time of *atzeret* — assembly for you; you shall not perform any *melechet avodah* — mundane work. You shall offer up a burnt offering, a fire offering for a spirit of satisfaction to the L-rd: one bull, one ram, and seven lambs in the first year, [all] unblemished. (*Sefer Bamidbar* 29:35-36, these and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, with my emendations)

Herein, the Torah informs us that the eighth day (that follows the seven days of Succot) is one of the *mikra'ei kodesh*, a *yom tov*. As such, it is a day upon which most *melechet avodah* is prohibited and *korbanot* (offerings) are brought to the *Beit HaMikdash*. While the Torah furnishes us with this information, it does not state a rationale for this *chag*; for this, we must turn to *Chazal* and our *meforshim* (exegetical expositors).

*Talmud Bavli, Succah* 55b hints at the basis of Shemini Atzeret:

Rabbi Elazar stated: “To what do those seventy bullocks [that were offered during the seven days of the Festival of Succot] correspond? [They refer symbolically] to the seventy nations [of the world]. To what does the single bullock [of Shemini Atzeret]

correspond? To the unique nation [the Jewish people].” This may be compared to a mortal king who said to his servants, “Prepare for me a great banquet,” but on the last day he said to his beloved friend, “Prepare for me a simple meal *sh’eheneh mimcha* — that I may derive benefit from you.” (Translation, *The Soncino Talmud*, with my emendations)

In his *Commentary on the Talmud* on this passage, Rashi (1040-1105) explains the expression “*sh’eheneh mimcha*” as referring to the Jewish people, Hashem’s beloved friend: “I [Hashem] do not derive pleasure and spiritual satisfaction from the others [nations of the world who are not obligated in the *mitzvot*], but, rather, only from you [the Jewish people who are commanded to fulfill My Torah].” (Brackets and translation my own) In words that conceal far more than they reveal, Rashi teaches us that Hashem derives “pleasure and spiritual satisfaction” from the Jewish people when they celebrate the *yom tov* of Shemini Atzeret, a statement which he proceeds to clarify:

**It is a [day of] assembly:** [That is, G-d says to Israel,] “I have detained you [in order for you to remain] with Me.” This is analogous to a king who invited his sons to feast with him for a certain number of days, and when the time came for them to leave, he said: “My sons! Please, stay with me just one more day, [for] *kasha al’lai paridatchem* — it is difficult for me to part with you!” [Similarly, after the seven days of Succot, G-d “detains” Israel for one extra holy day.] (*Sefer Vayikra* 23:36)

This interpretation finds parallel expression in Rashi’s explanation of the phrase “one bull, one ram” in *Sefer Bamidbar*:

These [*korbanot*] correspond to Israel. [G-d said,] “Remain with Me a little longer.” It expresses [His] affection [for Israel]. It is like children taking leave of their father, who says to them, “*kasha al’lai paridatchem* — it is difficult for me to part with you; stay one more day.” It is analogous to a king who made a banquet, etc. [and on the last day, his closest friend makes a small banquet for the king]. (29:36)

The lynchpin of these analyses is the phrase, *kasha al’lai paridatchem*, which exemplifies Rashi’s understanding of the essential nature of Shemini Atzeret. While its precise midrashic origin remains unknown, these words have captured the attention of many commentators who perceive it as strikingly illustrative of the relationship that obtains

between Hashem and the Jewish people. A singular example of this approach is found in the writings of Rav Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin (1823-1900):

It is said regarding *Tefilat Minchah* [which we pray] at the end of Shabbat, that it is the time when the *ratzon haelyon* — the supernal will — [of the Almighty] is most powerfully revealed. This is the rationale as to why [Hashem] declared *kasha al'lai paridatchem* on Shemini Atzeret that [in a certain sense] is the conclusion of the Festival [of Succot]. [Additionally,] this is the reason we say [in the *Tefilat Minchah* of Shabbat]: “You are One and Your Name is One, and who is like Your people one united nation on earth...” — [and this last expression] represents *hitachdut yisrael zeh im zeh* — the intrinsic union of the Jewish people — one to another. (*Pri Tzaddik, Kedushat Shabbat, Ma'amar VI*, translation and brackets my own)

In sum, for Rav Tzadok, Shemini Atzeret, like *Tefilat Minchah shel Shabbat*, represents a time when the *ratzon haelyon* of Hashem is most pronounced and accessible to His beloved nation. Therefore, Hashem declares “*kasha al'lai paridatchem*,” for this is the time He chooses to draw near to us. This closeness, in turn, creates the ideal conditions for *hitachdut yisrael zeh im zeh* — a hallmark of the *mikra'ei kodesh*, the days of holy occasion.

In his classic work, *Shem Mishmuel*, Rabbi Shmuel Bornsztain, the second Sochatchover Rebbe (1855-1926), asks a powerful question regarding the outcome of *kasha al'lai paridatchem*:

One must strive to understand [why Hashem desires one more day, that is, Shemini Atzeret, with the Jewish people]. Will this not further cause His manifest love for us to become even greater, and will not this cause the subsequent separation from us to become even more difficult? (*Moadim Shemini Atzeret v'Simchat Torah*, this and the following translation and brackets my own)

Rav Bornsztain begins his answer by noting that every instance of the number seven refers to that which is a normal part of nature. In contrast, the number eight always refers to something that is *l'ma'lah min hateva* — beyond nature. In addition, he opines that everything within nature is subject to *shichacha* — forgetfulness. Next, Rav Bornsztain

utilizes this key difference between seven and eight to explain the unique nature of Shemini Atzeret in words that are reminiscent of Rav Tzadok:

Therefore, during the entire period of the seven days of Succot, which are found within the number that represents nature, there will not remain any sense of permanency for the future. This is the [meaning] of the phrase *kasha al'lai paridatchem*, that you, the Jewish people will now create distance between yourselves [and this is the polar opposite of the unity that was achieved during Succot]. [In response,] Hashem, holds them back [from returning to their daily activities one more day], for this [eighth] day is l'ma'lah min hateva and [is not subject to being forgotten] and will therefore have a sense of permanency [for our nation]. For now, even when they return to their homes, they will not be separated from each other and their hearts will remain connected to one another [in love and unity].

Rav Tzadok's interpretation is an exegetical tour de force, for now we know that Shemini Atzeret is the *chag* par excellence of unity and love of one Jew for another. As the great Rabbi Akiva said so long ago, "*V'ahavta l'reicha kamocho; zeh klal gadol ba'Torah* — And you shall love your fellow Jew like yourself; this is an overarching principle of the Torah." (*Talmud Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:4*) With Hashem's help and our fervent desire, may this Shemini Atzeret be the time when this idea is realized, as we grow in our love for, and unity with, our fellow Jews. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom, *Chag Sameach* and may Hashem in His great mercy remove the *magafah* from *klal Yisrael* and from all the nations of the world.

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 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* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.