



TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Shemini Atzeres 5781

October 9, 2020

A Taste of Torah

Less is More

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

At first glance, Shemini Atzeres, the final day of Sukkos, seems like a letdown. We just spent seven days surrounded by mitzvos, having lived in the Sukkah and taken the Four Species. We experience the climax with Hoshana Rabbah, the final step of the Days of Awe that marks the delivery of G-d's decrees for each of us for the coming year, as we add special prayers and take a bundle of *aravos* (willow branches) in addition to the Four Species.

Suddenly, in the blink of an eye, it's all gone. The mitzvos of Sukkos vanish, and we are left with what seems to be a mitzvah-less holiday called Shemini Atzeres.

All is not lost, though, as on Shemini Atzeres, we celebrate the completion of the annual cycle of reading the Torah. In the Diaspora, this takes place on the second day of Shemini Atzeres, better known as Simchas Torah. In Eretz Yisrael, this takes place on the one and only day of Shemini Atzeres. But Simchas Torah raises more questions than it answers. Why do we celebrate the Torah specifically on Shemini Atzeres, and not on Sukkos? One could cynically think that this custom developed to add some excitement to a holiday devoid of other special mitzvos. But for those among us who look for truth, not cynicism, an explanation is certainly in order.

Our Sages teach us that one reason for the name of this holiday, Shemini Atzeres - which translates literally as "The Eighth of Withholding" - is because during Sukkos, special sacrifices are offered on behalf of the nations of the world. Seventy bulls in total are brought upon the Altar during the seven-day festival, one for each of the seventy nations. After this seven-

day global event, Hashem, as it were, asks His Chosen People to remain one day more for an intimate holiday apart from the rest of the world. This special one-day festival with Hashem when we "withhold" and don't depart is Shemini Atzeres.

How should one celebrate this brief but very special holiday? Mitzvos are wonderful and important, but mitzvos offer a limited connection to the spiritual world. Each mitzvah corresponds to one part of the human body and, by extension, to one aspect of Creation itself. During a holiday that marks the Jewish People's role as a Light unto the Nations, a People that reflects Hashem's presence to the entire world, having special mitzvos that connect us to different elements of the world is appropriate. This is already reflected in the length of the holiday, for seven is the number that reflects the natural world in which we live - a reality that can be seen from the many sevens that we experience in the natural world, such as notes on the musical scale, colors in white light, and days of the week. But when one is celebrating a festival that essentially asks us, as Jews, to withdraw from the natural world and spend time with nothing but G-d Himself, special mitzvos are not the way to express that reality. The one thing that does bring out the character of Shemini Atzeres is Torah. Torah, as the source of all mitzvos, at once encompasses the entirety of all 613 mitzvos and is also of a more elevated reality than the individual mitzvos. The Talmud teaches that the Torah preceded the world, and was in fact the blueprint and source of Creation. Torah is thus clearly something that transcends the natural world we have just spent seven days

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Stories for the Soul

A Dance to Remember

Mr. Abraham Foxman, former national director of the ADL, was born in Poland in 1940, shortly after the Nazis invaded Poland and WWII began. The family fled to Vilna, a large Jewish city in Lithuania, shortly after his birth. However, the Nazis forced the Jews of Vilna into a ghetto in 1941, and Abraham's parents, Joseph and Helen Foxman, left him in the care of his Catholic nanny. The nanny had the infant baptized and raised him as her own child.

Amazingly, Abraham's parents survived the Holocaust, and retrieved their child in 1945. Now five years old, Abraham had lived as a Catholic for most of his young life, and had little interest in Judaism. Nonetheless, he and his parents returned to Vilna and, on Simchas Torah of 1945, they joined other Jewish survivors and arrived at the once-grand Great Synagogue of Vilna, now in ruins.

In addition to the devastation wreaked upon the synagogue, the Torah scrolls had been stolen, and so as the attendees sought to begin the celebratory *hakafos* (circles of dancing) that mark Simchas Torah, they had no Torah scrolls to dance with.

As the people stood there, a Russian soldier approached Joseph Foxman. "I travelled a long way and did not encounter a single living Jewish child," he said. "But now, I see your son." The soldier explained that he had been a rabbi in Russia, but he had been conscripted into the Soviet army.

"If I cannot dance with a Torah scroll," said the man, "may I at least dance with your son?" Joseph granted

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Kollel Happenings

KOLLEL CLASSES CONTINUE VIA ZOOM MEETING

The Kollel is continuing many of its classes and offering new classes via Zoom Meeting. You can tune in to live classes online or call in on a phone. For a full schedule and the links and phone numbers to access this treasure trove of Torah, visit www.denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

BUILD YOUR LEGACY AND SECURE THE FUTURE OF TORAH WITH LIVE ON/LIFE & LEGACY

The Kollel is one of 28 local organizations selected to be part of Rose Community Foundation's Live On/LIFE & LEGACY program, which focuses on creating financial stability for the future through planned giving. Think it's not for you? Think again! Anyone can make a planned gift, no matter the amount. Visit www.denverkollel.org, email rmh@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855 for more information.

HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Parsha Quizzers

Parsha Quizzers are based upon Parshas Vizos Habracha

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|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1) Business conversion | 4) Copper mines |
| 2) Take tow | 5) Big jump |
| 3) Oil for grain | 6) Student takeover |

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Menashe ben Yisrael - Part XXIV

Rabbi Menashe experienced personal tragedy in his life, as he was predeceased by both of his sons. His son Joseph died in Poland in 1650 during an ill-fated business trip on behalf of the family printing press, which Rabbi Menashe's two sons managed in their father's

absence. His son Samuel, who published some of his father's works, died two months before his father in 1657. A daughter, Gracia, did outlive her father, and she married Samuel Abarbanel Barboza in 1646.

A Taste of Torah

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sanctifying. And so on day eight - with the number eight signifying a level that moves beyond the seven of the natural world - we celebrate the Torah itself. By celebrating the completion, as well as the start of, the annual cycle of reading the Torah, we are, in fact, including all of the mitzvos and all of the world within the embrace of Shemini Atzeres. We are not focusing on the details, but rather on

the totality and source of everything that we, as Hashem's Nation, are privileged to be connected with. Our celebration is one of appreciation of, and devotion to, Hashem and His Torah, the two absolute realities of existence with which we, the Jewish People, are inextricably linked and through which we, too, achieve immortality as a People.

Stories for the Soul

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permission, and the soldier hoisted the boy onto his shoulders. He began dancing, and the others joined in, singing the songs of Simchas Torah as they paraded the young Abraham Foxman around. After the *hakafos* had ended, the young child told his mother, "I like the Jewish church." It was that Simchas Torah that sparked the young boy's reconnection to his heritage.

The story does not end there. Mr. Foxman did not know what happened to that Russian soldier. But in 2004, famed songwriter Abie Rottenberg included a song titled *The Man from Vilna*

on his *Journeys 4* album which detailed the very story Mr. Foxman had related. A woman researching Mr. Foxman's story discovered the song, and found a footnote that explained the song was based on a true story related by Rabbi Leo Goldman of Detroit, Michigan. The researcher passed the information on to Mr. Foxman, who was able to contact Rabbi Goldman's daughter. Incredibly, Rabbi Goldman was still alive, though infirm and confined to a wheelchair. Sure enough, Rabbi Goldman was that Russian soldier! Mr. Foxman and Rabbi Goldman were reunited in 2010, 65 years after that 1945 Simchas Torah dance.

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|---|---------------------------------------|
| (1) Business conversion 33:19 s.v. amim | (3) Oil for grain 33:24 s.v. nitzi |
| (4) Copper mines 33:25 s.v. bazei | (2) Take tow 33:22 s.v. yitzmek |
| (5) Big jump 34:1 s.v. me'arvos | (6) Student takeover 34:5 s.v. aygams |

Parsha Quizzers - Answers

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