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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **SHMINI ATZERES / SIMCHAS TORAH /**
V'ZOS HABRACHA - 5773

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RABBI WEIN'S WEEKLY BLOG
Weekly Parsha
VZOT HABRACHA

The holy Torah concludes with the blessings of Moshe to the people of Israel before his passing from the world. Though the point has been made before, a number of times in these parsha articles, it bears repetition – the blessing to each of the tribes is different in detail and purpose. Contrary to much current belief and practice in religious Jewish society, there is no one-size-fits-all blessing and assignment in life to all Jews.

Rather Moshe, to whom the task of nation building was assigned by Heaven, looks to construct a whole nation, multi-faceted and productive, holy and complementary, one to another. If everyone is to be Zevulun then what will be of Torah study and knowledge amongst Israel? But if everyone is Yissachar then again Torah will fail to survive within Jewish society.

King Solomon advised us wisely that every child is to be educated according to the individual talents, predispositions and abilities of that particular child. When home schooling was the vogue of Jewish education in biblical times, such an individualized educational program was more possible and attainable. With the introduction of universal and

institutionalized schooling the task of individualized education, to meet every student's particular situation, became nearly impossible to achieve.

The system was built to create Yissachar and those that dropped out and became Zevulun were, to a certain extent, disrespected in the Jewish scholarly community. Though certainly Yissachar was to be respected, honored and supported, many generations lost sight that it was only through Zevulun that Yissachar could exist in the Jewish world. The two tribes were meant to complement each other, not to compete and denigrate one another.

It is striking to note how careful Moshe is to identify each tribe's nature and strengths. Moshe is the one person who forged the different tribes into one whole nation. He did so by granting each tribe its different due, by recognizing that all are necessary in this process of nation building.

The rabbis carried this idea farther when they identified the four species of plant life that form the commandment on Succot, as being representative of the basic groupings that have always formed Jewish life and society. All four groupings of plant life are necessary for the fulfillment of the commandment. All four groupings of Jews are also necessary to form a vital and healthy Jewish society. The striking variety of people and ideas that have always characterized Jewish society throughout the ages was recognized and extolled by Moshe through his individualized blessings to Israel before his passing from this world. At times Jewish society appears to be riven and chaotic and we all long for the elusive "Jewish unity" that we all pay lip service to.

But what we really should mean is not Jewish conformity but Jewish loyalty, which is a far different matter. There is an old Eastern European, Jewish/Yiddish ballad that states this matter clearly and succinctly: "Whatever we are, we are but we are all Jews!" The blessings of Moshe as they appear in our concluding parsha of the Torah should help guide us to this important conclusion. Chag Sameach
Rabbi Berel Wein

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Shemini Atzeret 5771 Above and Beyond
Rabbi Yehuda Gordon

The holiday of Succos is termed "z'man simchaseinu", the time of our joy. This term describes the elation that we feel after the heights of the Yomim Noraim which continue into Succos. After seven days of Succos, there is a small chag named Shemini Atzeres. This chag is not part of Succos. In davening this chag is also termed "z'man simchaseinu". What is the cause of this simchah, and in what way is it different than the rest of Succos?

In the natural, physical world there are many instances of groups of seven. There are seven days in a week, seven notes on a piano, why, even the World Series has seven games! Seven represents physical and natural order. On the other hand, the number eight represents a step above and beyond, a step out of the mundane and into another sphere. This is Shemini Atzeres. What is so special about Shemini Atzeres that it demands such standards? I believe that a lot can be learned from the name itself. Atzeres means to withhold, to stay back. The Gemara expounds; Hashem tells us that it is difficult for Him to part with us, and therefore requests, "Please stay with Me for one more day." If we look at the offerings for the Musaf during Succos, we will notice that there is a daily difference in the offerings of the bulls. On the first day we offer thirteen and the number lessens, one per day. Altogether, there are seventy bulls brought on Succos. This represents the seventy nations of the world and, specifically, that they lessen in strength just as the bulls are lessened. However, on Shemini Atzeres only one bull is offered. This represents the Jewish nation. Hashem says to us, "I want to have a moment of intensity with you alone, without the nations of the world. The nations are run by the natural and physical- but you are My people

and are above and beyond." This is Shemini Atzeres, the culmination of three weeks of endearment and closeness with Hashem. This is Shemini Atzeres, where Hashem Himself, so to speak, feels that it is difficult to leave. This a cause for great joy, a joy unrelated to the chag of Succos, but rather a step above and beyond. At the Yeshiva, we also have cause for great simchah. The pasuk in Nechemiah (Perek 8) relates the joy of the chag of Succos after the return of the exiles from Babylon. It states that, "This Sukkos was the greatest Succos since the days of Yehoshua son of Nun." The commentators find this puzzling. What was so special about Sukkos with Yehoshua over any other Sukkos? The answer may lie in the fact that this was the first Sukkos in the Land of Israel. There was a tremendous amount of joy found in that first Sukkos on our soil, which surpassed any other Sukkos. This joy was also found when we returned to our land in the days of Ezra and Nechemiah. For many of us in the Yeshiva it will be our first Sukkos in the Land of Israel and the excitement is palpable. Just walking outside one feels the chag in the air, and this only enhances the simchas Yom Tov.

May we all have a Shemini Atzeres filled with simchah, and may it be a harbinger for the upcoming year.

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Shmini Azteres: A Nuanced and Contemplative Time2 Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky

Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Torah Studies

[2 Many of the ideas presented hereto should be attributed to mori verabi **Rabbi Michael Rosensweig** Shlita, some of which were presented during the course of his daily shiurim on Maseches Sukka in 1997-1998]

Introduction

Shmini Azteres is perhaps the most complex and confusing holiday of the year on the Jewish calendar. What is the nature of the day? Are we supposed to view Shmini Azteres as the last day of Sukkos, or as a separate holiday with its own theme, juxtaposed immediately after another holiday? Every holiday has a symbol or action associated with it. On Pesach we have the matza, on Shavuos we stay up all night learning Torah and have the custom to eat dairy, on Rosh Hashana we blow the shofar, and of course Sukkos has the sukkah and arba minim – but what action or symbol do we associate with Shmini Azteres?

A usual place to investigate the essence of a holiday is to examine the text of the liturgy. However, even Chazal seem to have difficulty defining the day – is it Shmini Atzeres or Shmini Chag Haatzeres or Shmini Atzeres Hachag again accenting the confusion over designating the precise theme of the day³.

Another good place to begin understanding what a holiday is all about is the Torah reading on that day. However, even this simple exercise is shrouded with uncertainty. When one reads the entire Torah reading⁴ backwards and forwards something peculiar appears, or perhaps does not appear – there is no mention of the holiday of Shmini Azteres! Why didn't Chazal choose the Torah reading from either Parshas Emor or Pinchas in which the holiday is indeed mentioned? Furthermore, the usual practice on the second day of Yom Tov is to begin the selection in Parshas Reeh from Kol Hachach when the holiday falls out on a weekday, yet we read the portion from Aser Te'aser which deals with tzedakkah (charity) and canceling loans during the shmittah year. What is the connection between this Torah reading and Shmini Azteres?

There is one final question that must be answered. Although the institution of Simchat Torah came thousands of years after the Jews traveled in the desert, it still requires an explanation as to why the Geonim chose to append it to Shmini Azteres. What is the possible connection between these two seemingly distinct holidays and celebrations?

The Nature of the Day

The Talmud teaches that Shmini Azteres is a separate holiday and we therefore say the bracha of Shehechianu:

We have learned in a Beraisa in support of R. Nachman: The eighth day is a holy day by itself, has lots cast for itself, the benediction of time for itself, offerings for itself, a separate song for itself, and also a blessing for itself. Talmud Bavli Sukka 47b-48a

An added complication that we, especially those of us in galut face, is that although Shmini Azteres is a separate holiday, it is also still considered somewhat of a yom tov sheini (second day observed in the Diaspora) for the last day of Sukkos. This too is quite unusual since the last day of Sukkos is chol hamoed and not a typical yom tov!! The endless number of customs related to our orientation and use of the sukkah on Shmini Azteres also lends to our overall confusion about the holiday. It is also striking that unlike all other holidays, the Rambam does not have a section or chapter dedicated to the laws of Shmini Azteres.⁵

Comparing to other Holidays The annual holiday cycle commences with Pesach and ends with Shmini Atzeres. We begin, as our nation did, by celebrating our exodus from Egypt on Pesach and our receiving the Torah on Shavuos. This is followed by Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkos and finally Shmini Azteres. When we examine the month of Tishrei we encounter a mixture of emotions and themes.⁶ The first half of the month are the yemei hadin filled with fear and trepidation. This is in stark contrast to the days of sukkos which the Rambam⁷ describes as days filled with simcha yeseira, exceptional joy. These holidays represent the extremes in terms of our approach in avodas Hashem (service of G-d). We find both expressions in Sefer Tehillim.

Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with quaking. Psalms 2:11
Serve the Lord with joy, come before Him with praise Psalms 100:2

In addition to the feelings that are accompanied with each of these holidays, we have many objects and actions that represent and symbolize the essence of the day. The solemn blowing of the shofar instills within us the seriousness of the day of judgment. On Sukkos we encounter the sight of joyfully waving the arba minim while chanting the Hallel or dancing at a simchas beis hashoeiva.

All of this can be contrasted with Shmini Azteres. Shmini Azteres is absent of any maase mitzvos, no physical object to attach meaning to, and no apparent salient theme or motif. So what are we celebrating on Shmini Azteres?

Let us return to the first time that the holiday is mentioned in the Torah and attempt to define the word atzeres.

[For] a seven day period, you shall bring a fire offering to the Lord. On the eighth day, it shall be a holy occasion for you, and you shall bring a fire offering to the Lord. It is a [day of] detention. You shall not perform any work of labor Vayikra 23:36

Seven days you shall bring sacrifices before the Lord, the eighth day shall be a holy day for you and you shall bring a sacrifice before the Lord, a gathering, all work shall not be performed. Onkelos Vayikra 23:36

Some explain atzeres to mean a congregation Ibn Ezra Vayikra 23:36 Targum Onkelos and the Ibn Ezra define atzeres as a day to "gather in". But what are we gathering in? I would like to offer two approaches.

Approach #1: Gathering a Unified Nation:

After spending seven days with our arba minim and performing the requisite eged, or binding of the species together, representative of the different facets of our people,⁸ we bind ourselves together as one people with Hashem. Unlike the other holidays in which the kedushat hayom is focused on Lashem or Mikra Kodesh the pasuk simply says Atzeres Tehiye Lache, it is a day of detention.¹⁰ As such, the theme of Shmini Azteres is achdut, and we therefore gather together an extra day for the simple purpose of spending an additional day together. We can now explain the protracted reading beginning with Aser Te'aser even on a

weekday, because the focus of these earlier pesukim are on the needy and less fortunate and our collective responsibility to care for them as our own:

And the Levite because he has no portion or inheritance with you and the stranger, and the orphan, and the widow, who are in your cities, will come and eat and be satisfied; so that the Lord, your God, will bless you in all the work of your hand that you will do. Devarim 14:29

This approach also clarifies the absence of maase mitzvos on Shmini Azteres. Since the essence of the holiday is to focus on our basic relationships with our fellow Jews and we do not need the excitement and fanfare provided by external objects or ceremonies. Therefore, even though the actual holiday of Shmini Azteres does not appear in this Torah portion, its main theme of unity and oneness are reflected both at the beginning and end. Our true expression of simcha is not when we dance with the lulav but when we rejoice with the convert, orphan and widow.

You shall make yourself the Festival of Sukkoth for seven days, when you gather in [the produce] from your threshing floor and your vat. And you shall rejoice in your Festival-you, and your son, and your daughter, and your manservant, and your maidservant, and the Levite, and the stranger, and the orphan, and the widow, who are within your cities. Devarim 16:13-14

Enduring a full month of Elul preparing for Rosh Hashana, and after enduring through the days of awe of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and after rejoicing in the mitzvos of sukka and lulav, all of the previous barriers which may have separated us from our fellow Jews have come tumbling down. We have hopefully elevated ourselves spiritually above the mundane matters or pithy arguments.

As such, Shmini Azteres is a day to rededicate ourselves to mending our interpersonal relationships with one another and taking a more inclusive approach to our community.

With this backdrop of our unity we can understand why it is precisely now after Sukkos that Hashem requests that we dedicate a holiday for the sole purpose of being secluded alone with Him.

"I have detained 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] it is difficult for me to part with you!" Rashi Vayikra 23:36

As a nation, we are summoned to "stay another day" in the presence of the Shechinah. After completing a more universal approach through our prayers on Rosh Hashana and our many sacrificial offerings on Sukkos, we are now ready to focus on our unique relationship with Hashem. On Shmini Azteres we offer a single korban!¹³ This again underscores a sense of unity and closeness with Hashem as His nation. This is the Kehilah of the Ibn Ezra and the k'nishin of Onkelos. Only after solidifying our relationships with one another does Hashem require us to stay an extra day alone with him.¹⁴

We can now piece together our understanding of Shmini Azteres to the celebration of Simchas Torah. The Torah is the conduit for our unity. Our feeble conception of Hashem can only be understood through the prism of the Torah.¹⁵ The Zohar teaches us "Kudsha Brich Hu Viorasa Viysrael Chad Hu" Hashem, His Torah, and the Jewish people are one. Only when we as a nation exemplify achdus are we worthy to accept the Torah and have a relationship with Hashem. The Orach Chaim Hakadosh¹⁶ views our unity as a prerequisite for our receiving the Torah, as the passuk says Vayichan Sham Yisrael Kineged Hahar" and Rashi explains the reason why the Torah describes the Jewish people's encampment in the singular form is to express that they encamped Kiish Echad Bilev Echad.

However, it should be noted, that our connection with the Torah is not only communal but also on the individual level as well. All of the vessels fashioned for the Mishkan are listed as being fashioned by

individuals except for the Aron which housed the Luchos for which the Torah says¹⁷ Viasu Aron Atzei Shitim, and they make the Aron out of Shitim wood." The Medrash expounds the following on this change from singular to plural:

Why is it that all by all the other vessels is it written "and you make" but by the ark it states "and they make", Says R. Yehuda son of Shalom, so says G-d, "everyone should participate in the making of the ark in order for all to merit the Torah" Midrash Shemot Rabba 34

On Simchas Torah we all get a chance to dance with the Torah, we all get an aliyah, and we all are able to singularly and collectively express our connection to Visein Chelkeinu Bisorasecha, our unique portion in the Torah.¹⁸¹⁹

Both Shavuos and Shmini Azteres incorporate the theme of Kabbalas HaTorah, albeit, on Shavuos we accepted the Torah under duress and accompanied with thunder and lightning, whereas on Shmini Azteres, at the culmination of the festival punctuated with joy and happiness, we rededicate ourselves to the values of the Torah through simcha.

Approach #2: A Time to Reflect:

Another approach to our "gathering" on Shmini Azteres is found in the writings of Rav S. R. Hirsch.²⁰

"We accordingly think we are not wrong if we take azteres to designate a day which is not fixed to bring new lessons and new truths for us all to accept and assimilate, but which has the mission to keep us still before the Presence of God – with this the idea of Atzira Mimilacha would certainly apply – to strengthen and solidify the impressions and knowledge we have already gained, so that they remain with us permanently, and do not become lost in the hurly-burly of life... The purpose of azteres is accomplished by our realizing once again all that we have gained by the festival, and by the firm resolution not to allow ourselves to be robbed in the turmoil and struggle and work our lives of what we have won... Shmini Azteres would come to tell us, once again to summarize and gather to ourselves all the thoughts and messages and resolutions which the moadim of the whole year have brought to us and to resolve to persevere and hold fast to them before God, To impress them so deeply in our hearts that they become an unassailable part of ourselves which cannot become lost in the course of the ordinary run of our yearly life on which we are now entering."²¹

Shmini Azteres is the culmination of the holiday season. Therefore, all the lessons that we have gained, starting with Pesach and ending with Sukkos are to be contemplated and internalized during Shmini Azteres.²² It is for this reason that the holiday is not accompanied with any mitzvah items that may detract or distract us from this process. Shmini Azteres is a time to reflect upon and somehow integrate into ourselves the sometimes opposite themes of yirah vafachad, fear and trepidation, associated with the yemei hadin and at the same time the simcha yeseira of Sukkos.²³ This final holiday, without the fanfare or excitement often generated by other festivals, with a Torah reading that does not even mention its name, charges us with the duty to incorporate all the ideas we have studied, sermons we have heard, and emotions we have felt, into our daily lives as we return to the "hurly-burly of life." The word for a stop sign in Hebrew is "aztor", because it engages us to stop before continuing on our way. Shmini Azteres is a time to stop and reflect and to uplift our mundane lives with the spirituality it deserves.

The best way to ensure that our lives will be infused with spirituality and meaning is through our dedication to Talmud Torah. For example, by studying the Shulchan Aruch, we become aware of the myriad laws that we encounter on a daily basis in our work place and with our dealings with others. Additionally, the ultimate expression of synthesis of the opposing themes of "yirah" and "simcha" is portrayed through our daily commitment to the study of Torah.

The orders of the Lord are upright, causing the heart to rejoice; Psalms 19:9

On the one hand, we must approach the study of Torah with fear and trepidation, on the other hand, engaging in serious Torah study provides us the greatest enjoyment!24

Perhaps these are two themes that we should reflect upon while dancing with the Torah celebrating the culmination of the holiday cycle on Shmini Azteres and Simchat Torah.

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas V'zos Habracha

PARSHAS V'ZOS HABRACHA

Hashem came from Sinai having shone forth to them from Seir, having appeared from Har Paran. (33:2) Sifri teaches that, prior to giving the Torah to Klal Yisrael, Hashem offered it to the nations of the world. "Are you willing to accept the Torah?" Hashem asked, "What is written in it?" was the immediate reply. No gentile nation was willing to accept a legal system and guide which they thought would be incompatible with its chosen lifestyle. Thus, once the citizens of the three dominant nations of the world heard that moral deviation, theft and murder were prohibited forms of activity, they wanted no part of the Torah. These sins constituted a way of life for them. They could not possibly exist on a diet that excluded such morally repugnant behavior. The Torah did not coincide with their character. To explain this better, Horav Aryeh Leib Bakst, zl, observes that the Torah is given from the Melameid Torah, the One who teaches Torah to Klal Yisrael. Hashem does not just drop off a Torah scroll and say, "Read". He "teaches" the Torah to the lomeid, one who studies it. Under such circumstances, it is essential that the student of the Torah be appropriately suited to be a vessel for Hashroas HaShechinah, the resting of the Divine Presence on him. This is the underlying idea behind the command, V'yikchu Li, "And they shall take for Me." A Jew does not just study Torah. He gives himself over totally to Hashem. The gentiles are unable to cope with such a relationship, since it is contrary to their basic character. This, explains Rav Bakst, is why Chazal in the Talmud Sanhedrin 29 say that an akum, idol-worshipper, who studies Torah is liable for death. Torah tzivah lanu Moshe, morashah kehillas Yaakov, "The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov" (Ibid. 33:4). It is ours by right. It is our inheritance, bequeathed to us by its Divine Author. Thus, even if by some quirk their wise men - and they do have many brilliant scholars - would attempt to study Torah, they will not succeed in plumbing its depths. In order to achieve knowledge in Torah, it must be given to the student by Hashem. Otherwise, it simply does not take hold. Torah study is not a discipline; it is the tangible representation of the relationship between the student and Hashem. If the student is not on the proper plateau - spiritually and ethically - he will achieve no success. He may amass wisdom, but not Torah! In the Selichos for Asarah b'Teves, the payton writes, Diachani b'shemonah bo smalis v'yeminis, halo shlashton kavaati taanis, "He surrounded me on the eighth day with darkness left and right, for these three events I instituted a fast." This is a reference to the time that the Greek King Ptolemy compelled 72 Jewish scholars to render the Torah into Greek. He placed the 72 scholars in separate chambers without revealing to any of them why they had been summoned. He entered each room and said, "Write for me the Torah of Moshe, your teacher," Miraculously, Hashem put in each one's heart an identical translation, so that Ptolemy could find no variations whatsoever among them. Even in those places when the Sages purposely altered the translation, the results were identical. This constituted a neis galui,

revealed miracle, and created an incredible kavod Shomayim, glory of Heaven. Yet, Chazal consider this day, the eighth of Teves, a sorrowful day for the Jewish People, comparing it to the day that the Golden Calf was made. Megillas Taanis explains this in the following manner. "On the eighth day of Teves, the Torah was rendered into Greek during the days of King Ptolemy, and darkness descended to the world for three days. To what may the matter be likened? To a lion captured and imprisoned. Prior to his imprisonment all feared him and fled from his presence. Now, all come to gaze at him and ask, "Where is this one's strength?" Likewise, as long as the Torah was only in Hebrew and could only be interpreted by our Sages, it evoked awe and reverence. As such, many feared casting aspersion on it. For a non-Jew to study Torah, he first had to become proficient in lashon kodesh, Hebrew/Holy tongue, and the various ways for understanding the Torah. Learning Torah required much preparation. Once the Torah was "imprisoned" in the Greek translation, it was almost as if the Torah had become bereft of its reverence. Whoever wished could now gaze at the Torah; find fault and cast aspersion on its mitzvos, and eschew further understanding of its commandments. Herein lies its similarity to the sin of the Golden Calf. A graven image has no reality and no substance. Likewise, the Greek translation is nothing more than that - a translation. It is devoid of the reality and true substance of Torah. Now, the members of the non-Jewish world could imagine that they, too, were privy to the Torah's secrets. The Rosh Yeshivah concludes with one caveat. While limud haTorah remains beyond the gentile's purview, tefillah, prayer, does not. Yes, a non-Jew may pray, and his prayer has meaning and efficacy. Torah is Hashem's conversation with man, thus requiring man to be on an appropriate spiritual plateau in order to be a part of the dialogue, to understand what is being said, and to accept and incorporate its lessons into his psyche. Prayer is man's conversation with G-d. Man can present his innermost emotions and requests to Hashem, Who understands their origin and responds accordingly.

The Torah that Moshe commanded to us is the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov. (33:4) The Torah does not belong to a select few, to a spiritual elite who acknowledge, appreciate and value everything that it has to offer. The Torah belongs to Kehillas Yaakov, the entire congregation of Yaakov. All Jews have a portion in this inheritance. What are we doing about it? The story is told that one Simchas Torah, the venerable sage, founder of the mussar, ethical/character refinement, movement, Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, was engrossed in lively dancing with his students. The mood was electrifying. Suddenly, for what seemed to be no reason, Rav Yisrael stopped dancing, and his mood turned pensive and somber. This transformation in their revered rebbe brought his students to extreme incredulity. One of them, not given to being shy, came forward and asked Rav Yisrael what was wrong. Rav Yisrael replied, "As I was dancing with the Torah, I realized that in this town alone there are many Jewish boys who will not go to a Torah school. They have no chance of tasting its sweetness, of dancing with the Torah as we do. They neither have a clue that today is Simchas Torah, nor do they have any idea what this means. How can we rejoice with the Torah while being fully aware that there are so many Jews who are deprived of their rightful heritage?"

Rav Yisrael's anguish was expressed over a century ago. Since then the situation has far from improved. He was witnessing the early effects of the Haskalah, Enlightenment movement, and the way it tore young people away from their Jewish roots, creating animosity between their generation and that of their parents and grandparents. What should we say when we see the products of generations of Jews severed from a life of Torah, alienated from their heritage, who have embraced the gentile way of life with its perversions and moral/spiritual bankruptcy? Yet, we tout the success of the Torah world, which is truly mind-boggling. Veritably, we have come so far. Just to have witnessed the recent Siyum

HaShas is testament to the incredible growth of Torah. What does one say, however, to a father who has a sick child, a child that, lo aleinu, is hovering between life and death? Do we tell him to forget about this one, because, after all, look how well the others are? Certainly, such a statement would be not only insensitive - it would be ludicrous. Well, what do we say to our Father in Heaven Above: "There were almost 100,000 of your children at the Siyum HaShas." What about the majority of His children who have no idea what a Talmud is - let alone a Siyum HaShas. How can we not empathize with the Ribono Shel Olam when so many of His children have deviated - and in many cases not due to their own fault - from the rich path of Torah? So, as we read these words on Simchas Torah, let us think about Our Father in Heaven and make every attempt to see to it that next year more of His children will experience the meaning of v'chayei olam nota b'socheinu.

The one who said of his father and mother, "I have not favored him"; his brothers he did not give recognition and his children he did not know; for they (the Leviim) have observed Your word and Your covenant they preserved. (33:9) As Moshe Rabbeinu prepared to bless Shevet Levi, he characterized it according to the unusual qualities and virtues of the people. He related their unwavering devotion to the Almighty, their consummate ability to withstand and triumph over the most difficult challenges - all because of their intense fealty to Hashem. Nothing stood in their way - not even their most personal commitments. Their commitment to Hashem transcended everything. This quality was evinced during the sin of the Golden Calf when Moshe declared, Mi l'Hashem elai - "Whoever is for Hashem, join me!" (Shemos 32:26). Shevet Levi came forth in unison, ready to perform their leader's bidding. His every request was their command. Indeed, it was Torah. They were told to rid the congregation of those who had sinned with the Golden Calf. For some, this meant taking the lives of a maternal grandfather, brother by the same mother, or even a daughter's son. Undoubtedly, the filial love was there, but the dedication to Hashem was stronger. These actions clearly indicated the spiritual mettle which distinguished the members of Shevet Levi. They never thought of themselves; their personal lives and loves had no bearing if it was incongruous with Hashem's word. They were prepared to divorce themselves from normal human emotion. It is for this reason that part of Moshe's blessing appears incredulous, almost misplaced. Moshe says, Ki shamru imrasecha u'brisha yintzoru, "For they (the Leviim) have observed Your word and Your covenant they persevered." Is this not what every single Jew must do? Is this a reason for singling out Shevet Levi? Horav Avraham Zelmens, zl, derives an important lesson from here. The most distinguished Jew, regardless of his extreme level of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice and devotion to Hashem and his Torah, must still be cognizant and ever-vigilant of the most simple mitzvah. Commitment to the most high, the loftiest, most demanding, emotionally trying mitzvah does not excuse him one iota from his total responsibility to the other mitzvos! A Jew must be committed across the board - to everything. Doing the "big stuff" does not excuse any form of unbecoming behavior. Davening a long Shemoneh Esrai does not allow for one to act inappropriately towards his friend. One should not say, "I am cut out for the 'exotic' mitzvos." We can underscore an even deeper lesson. We observe that there are two extremes in religious observance. There are those who are unable to get over the "hump," to obligate themselves to perform the more difficult mitzvos, settling instead for those mitzvos which represent less of a challenge. There are also those Jews who undertake the most difficult, challenging mitzvos, yet are unable to daven properly, to be meticulous concerning krias haTorah, the reading of the Torah, etc. They will battle against any infringement upon Torah law; they will withstand the most trying challenges, yet are unable to do so, or do not "apply" themselves properly to the daily endeavor of being an observant Jew. An adam ha'shaleim, complete/perfect Jew, is

one who does it all, who rises above filial emotion when necessary, yet is meticulous in carrying out each and every mitzvah to its fullest extent. Thus, the blessing to Shevet Levi concludes: Yoru mishpatecha l'Yaakov v'Sorascha l'Yisrael; "They shall teach Your ordinances to Yaakov, and Your Torah to Yisrael." Only one who has achieved shleimus as a Jew, complete devotion under all circumstances, is slated and suited to teach others. Perhaps we may take this a bit further. The members of Shevet Levi were destined to be the nation's teachers due to their overall commitment to Hashem and His Torah. While this does not preclude their level of Torah scholarship, it does bring into question why the nation's Torah teachers were not selected from the tribe that had produced the greatest scholars. Since when does the manner of a person's avodas Hashem determine his ability to teach? The members of Shevet Yissachar did not budge from their commitment to intense Torah study. Should they not have been the nation's pedagogues? Imagine a university seeking a professor of math; certainly their choice would be based upon erudition - not devotion to and passion for math. Apparently, Torah study is different. Authored by the Divine, it is much more than a compendium of knowledge and wisdom. Torah is a way of life - our way of life. Other forms of study are mastered by understanding, with excellence being achieved through scholarship. Not so Torah. Only one who lives the Torah to the fullest, who achieves shleimus, can truly impact the Torah experience to his students. A great rebbe certainly must be knowledgeable, but if he does not exemplify Torah living to its zenith, his ability to teach becomes substandard. Moshe Rabbeinu was the greatest Navi, prophet. Indeed, in the Torah's epithet to him, it writes V'lo kam navi od b'Yisrael k'Moshe, "Never again has there arisen in Yisrael a prophet like Moshe" (Devarim 34:10). Yet, when we refer to Moshe, we say Rabbeinu, our Teacher, or Rabban shel kol Yisrael, the Teacher of all Yisrael. His distinction as the greatest prophet seem secondary to his leadership as Klal Yisrael's quintessential Rebbe. Perhaps this is because Moshe, the Navi, did not reach the entire Jewish People individually as did Moshe, the Teacher. Rabban shel kol Yisrael means that Moshe was rebbe to every Jew. Each and every Jew felt a personal affinity to Moshe Rabbeinu. After all, he was his rebbe. In addition, every rebbe throughout the millennia steps into Moshe's shoes. We cannot become Neviim, but the ability to mentor another Jew is available to us all. There is no dearth of rebbe stories. Many people have had a mentor who impacted his life in some special way. In searching for that special story, I came upon an episode which occurred with Horav Shimon Shkop, zl, Rosh Yeshivah of Grodno, and one of the greatest Torah mentors of the last century. This story was related by a student of Grodno long after he had left the yeshivah and had suffered the travails of the Holocaust. He explained how, despite the many tragedies that had been a part of his life, he still maintained his unwavering commitment to Yiddishkeit. This is his story: "I was a young boy when my parents sent me to study in the mechinah (high school) of Yeshivas Grodno. My parents were very poor and could not even afford the rail ticket to send me there. The decision was made for me to walk to Grodno - a distance of about three days. They gave me a little food to take along and instructed me that when I ran out of food, to ask for food from members of the Jewish communities which I would pass. This was mesiras nefesh, devotion to Torah, in those days - both on the part of the parents, and the youngster who left home by foot with little food, with no money and no contacts. "I slept on the shul benches or on the floor wherever I found one. I was constantly worried whether I would find some food. More importantly, I was anxious about my bechinah, entrance exam. I was concerned that if I fail, I would humiliate my parents. I would have to return home, humiliated and dejected. These thoughts traversed my mind as I devoted every available moment to preparing for my test. "I finally arrived at the yeshivah, hungry and tired, totally spent from my difficult trip, but I was ready for the farhar, test. The students whom I met directed me to the Rosh

Yeshivah's "office," which was actually the kitchen in his home. I was about to meet one of the preeminent Roshei Yeshivah in the world - in his kitchen which also served as his office. "The Rosh Yeshivah welcomed me with an endearing smile which immediately made me at ease. Now, for the bechinah. After asking me concerning my basic family history, my origins and where I had previously studied, Rav Shimon said, 'I have only two questions to ask of you. That is it.' I thought to myself, 'This was it; I was about to take my entrance exam based upon two questions.' "My first question is," Rav Shimon began, "When did you last have a warm meal?" I was shocked by his 'first' question, although I do not think he was as taken aback with my reply, 'I last had a warm meal three weeks ago!' The Rosh Yeshivah immediately rose from his chair and apologized for his lack of culinary proficiency. Regrettably, his rebbetzin was not home. I would have to suffice with whatever he could put together for me! I was shocked beyond belief; I had never before seen a man prepare a meal - not even my father, and here was Rav Shimon Shkop bustling around the kitchen - for me, a youngster from a small village, who was not even his student! "As soon as the meal was prepared, Rav Shimon placed it before me and waited to see that I had enough. Indeed, he filled my plate a second time, until he could tell that I was satiated. I benched; the table was cleared off and now it was time for the second question: "Now we will continue with the next question." I assumed that now that I had eaten, the bechinah would begin in earnest. "Tell me," Rav Shimon asked, "when did you last sleep in a bed?" I did not believe his question, but it was as I am telling you. He wanted to know when I had last slept in a bed. I told him the truth, 'I do not remember, it has been so long.' Rav Shimon took me by the hand and led me to a bed. He 'tucked' me in, and I slept that night like I had never slept before. The next morning I discovered, to my chagrin, that I had slept in the Rosh Yeshivah's own bed! "This was my entrance exam to Yeshivas Grodno. My life has not been easy. I survived the horrors of the Holocaust, watched most of my family and friends perish al Kiddush Hashem. Yet, I never faltered; I never wavered in my devotion to Yiddishkeit and my commitment to Torah and mitzvos. Why? What kept me going? What gave me the strength to overcome? It was the 'two questions' that comprised my entrance exam to Grodno." We now have an idea what it is that characterizes a rebbe and the everlasting impact he can have on the life of his student.

Rejoice, O' Zevullun, in your excursions, and Yissachar in your tent. (33:18) The definition of a good life is relative. Clearly, there are those who have very few material comforts, yet they never complain. After all, they do not sense a need for anything more than what they have. In contrast, there are those who seem to have everything, but it is never enough. Yissachar and Zevullun characterize a utopian approach to Torah living. Yissachar devotes all of his time to Torah study. His material needs are addressed by his devoted brother, Zevullun, whose day is spent toiling in the world of commerce. Why is this considered utopia? Zevullun understands the need for supporting his brother. Yissachar is prepared to give it all up just to learn. Zevullun does not make Yissachar feel like a shnorrer. Indeed, Zevullun feels honored, in fact privileged, to share in some part in Yissachar's learning. When the ben Torah is treated royally, and the one who toils in the field of commerce feels privileged, this is utopia! A student of the Rosh Yeshivah of Beth Medrash Govohah, Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, informed his rebbe that he was leaving the yeshivah to try his luck in the outside world. Apparently, it was not a cut and dry issue of "no money." It was more than that. The student felt that it was "enough;" it was now time to leave and "do something". When the Rosh Yeshivah expressed his disappointment with the student's decision, the young man explained that the Rosh Yeshivah need not worry. He would heartily support Torah scholars. Thus, he would share in their Olam Habba, portion in the World to Come. He was doing a good thing. Rav Aharon countered

that it was not his Olam Habba which concerned him, but rather, his Olam hazeh, This World, that worried him. True, he would be rewarded in the World to Come for his efforts on behalf of Torah, but what about a geshmak, feeling of satisfaction, in this world? How can one enjoy a life that is devoid of Torah learning? This was the perspective of the man who spearheaded the development of Torah in America post World War II. He was acutely aware of the sense of satisfaction, the feeling of "having it all," that accompanies toiling in the field of Torah. Zevullun, on the other hand, was exposed to a business world with its often moral and ethical bankruptcy. It would be a constant battle to circumvent and transcend the indecorous "opportunities" which avail themselves. The allure of success and easy money can be quite overwhelming. S'mach Zevullun b'tzeitsecha, "Rejoice, O' Zevullun, in your excursions." Zevullun, when you leave this world on your final excursion, you can rest assured that you will finally reap your well-earned reward. Yissachar b'ohalecha, "Your brother Yissachar has enjoyed his life in Olam Hazeh," because his Olam Hazeh consists of toiling in Torah. Sponsored I'os hakaros hatov u'lichvod mishpacha Harav Avraham Leib Scheinbaum v'ra'eeso sheyichyu from Meir Tzvi and Perel Braun Peninim mailing list Peninim@shemayisrael.com http://shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/peninim_shemayisrael.com

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Jewish Holidays Shmini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

The Lost Torah Scroll

Bringing Torah home. by Rabbi Binyomin Pruzansky

The little kids quickly formed a train, each with his hands on the shoulders of the boy in front of him. They lurched into motion, running madly around the periphery of the shul as throngs of people danced in concentric rings around the bima. Some carried Torah scrolls, adorned in silver crowns and velvet finery. Others carried their small children on their shoulders. As one song ended, another one caught on, and no one wanted to stop. Observing the action was a girl name Rachel, one of a group of teenage girls who were guests at the home of Rabbi Benzion Klatzko. Dressed in her fashionable best, she watched the frenetic scene with glee; this was an experience unlike any she had encountered thus far in Judaism. To Rachel, the spirit of the night was an injection of life itself, a salve for her ailing soul. All at once, Rachel's snapped into sharp focus. Their host, Rabbi Klatzko, stood up on a chair in front of the bima, clutching a miniature Torah scroll in his hands. He had a story to tell, and the men, women and children packed into the shul were eager to hear it. Rachel strained to hear every word of the tale, for she knew that it would speak to her. "Every week, in my home, I have the privilege of hosting about 30 to 40 people for Shabbos meals. Most of them are college students who are Jewish but have never had the chance to experience a Shabbos. They come from all kinds of backgrounds and all kinds of places across the country, and they join together at my home and get a taste of what Shabbos is about. "The only thing is, many of them are uncomfortable about going to a traditional shul. They'd rather stay at my house and wait until I come home. The drawback to that is that they never have the chance to see the beauty of a real Shabbos davening. So I decided that the best thing to do would be to buy my own Torah scroll and ark for my living room. That way, I could have the davening at home, and they could take part in it and still feel comfortable. Plus, it would give many of them a chance for an aliyah, some who haven't had one since their bar mitzvah. And there are those that didn't even have a bar mitzvah and have never been called up to the Torah in their lives. "The question was, how would I ever find a kosher Torah scroll at a decent price? And an ark would also be a big investment. So it seemed that, short of a miracle, my idea would be impossible to pull off. However, God doesn't just perform miracles for you. You have to do your part and hope that He will take care of the rest.

"So I opened up the papers and looked around to see if anyone had a Torah scroll for sale. And believe it or not, someone did. I immediately called the number and on the other end of the phone was an elderly man who said he had a very small Torah scroll that he was selling. It was 11 inches tall. The Torah scroll had been sitting in his closet unused for 50 years. "I asked him where he got it, and he told me that his father had been a rabbi of a shul in the Catskills which eventually died out. They auctioned everything off, and the Torah scroll was the only thing they kept. It had been sitting in his closet unused for 50 years, and now he felt it was time to sell that as well. "Although he wanted quite a bit of money for it and the price was a bit steep for me, I told him that I would like to take a look at it. He agreed to come to my home to show me the Torah. "A few days later Mr. Foreman came. He showed me a beautiful Torah scroll -- over 200 years old but in perfect condition. He asked me why I needed it, and I explained about my Shabbos guests and my idea to enable them to daven at my home, where they would be comfortable. "He stared at me for a moment seeming very moved by the idea that this Torah would help people come closer to Judaism. All of a sudden, he started crying -- I mean really crying with tears streaming down his face. I was trying to get him to talk, but he literally couldn't get any words out. Finally, he explained. He had drifted away from Judaism and married a Buddhist woman. This Torah scroll was his only connection, and at this point, he felt so cut off that he thought he might as well sell it. But when he found out that this Torah would help reconnect people to Judaism, he wanted to give it to me as a gift. In this way, he felt he would perhaps have the merit to be reconnected too and find his way home at last. "I didn't know what to say, but I certainly appreciated his incredible gift. I realized that this was a Torah that had been basically homeless for the past 50 years. There was no one to read it, hold it or keep it properly, and now God gave the Torah a home, and would hopefully bring this lonely Jew back in the near future as well. "Now, what about an ark? That's a story of its own. I found an online ad for an old Jewish artifact, a Jewish chest. The sellers weren't Jewish, but they had bought it from a priest who told them it was of Jewish origin. On top of the ark was a large cross. I almost fainted. "When I opened the online pictures of the chest, I saw before me what seemed to be a beautifully crafted ark. It was small, so it wouldn't be able to hold a regular sized Torah, but would be perfect for the Torah we had. But when I viewed a picture of the top of the ark, I almost fainted. There was a large cross attached to it. All of a sudden, I was not at all sure that this was an item of Jewish origin. Suddenly I noticed a small plaque at the bottom of it. I asked the sellers to send me a photo of the plaque which appeared to have Hebrew writing on it. They sent me a picture where there was a clear inscription in Hebrew that said "Behold, the guardian of Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers Psalms 121), which proved that the item must be Jewish. The cross upon closer examination, they said, was a separate piece that had been attached. I realized that the priest who bought this ark must have made that addition. I was deeply moved, and was certain that the hand of God was clearly guiding me. "I bought the ark and had it delivered to my home. The cross was removed and I marveled at the verse that was inscribed. I have never seen this particular verse inscribed on an ark before. And I realized that there was a message here. It was as if God were saying that although this ark was lost for many years, He would never forget about it. He didn't rest until it finally was brought home to Jewish hands. "My dear friends, look at what we have here. A Torah that was neglected for so many years was finally given a home in an ark that had been used by a priest. Yet the message was clear that God would never give up on them. He had not forgotten about this lost ark and Torah scroll, and finally the two of them were brought together and can now be used to bring young men and woman back to their Father in Heaven as well. "This Torah has not been danced with for over 50 years, and now we have the chance to welcome it home. Let's give it the welcome it deserves." As if on cue, the entire

shul erupted in singing and dancing. The tiny Torah scroll was in the center of it all, soaking up the overflowing love and honor it had been missing for decades. It was no longer locked away, unused and untouched on this holiday meant for rejoicing. It was where it belonged, in the center of it all. Later that night, Rabbi Klatzko brought the Torah home and secured it inside the ark in his living room. To Rachel, it was not just the sense of tranquility and warmth that Rachel relished. It was the awesome, indescribable feeling of this unique Torah scroll. The meal ended late, and at last, the contented but exhausted group headed to their rooms for a night's sleep. Rachel, lay in bed, eyes wide open, with the sound of her heart beating in her ears. She waited a long time, perhaps an hour or more, until she was certain that no one in the house remained awake. She slipped out of bed and tip-toed into the living room. There stood the ark, as if it had been waiting for her.

Click here to receive Aish.com's free weekly email. There, she spoke her heart to God, praying that the sweetness of this home would be hers, in her own life, some day. These were the first prayers her lips had uttered for many years. The bitterness of her own family home -- the constant fighting, the blame and anger, the storm clouds that threatened to blow through the front door at any moment -- had acted like a razor-sharp wire-cutter, severing her connection to God. Here at the Klatzko's home, she could feel the connection being mended; the power was sputtering back into her being, and once again beginning to flow. Recalling the Torah scroll's exile, she thought of herself. "My dear, holy Torah scroll, you know what it's like to be neglected. You know how it feels to live with people who don't see the beauty in you and don't understand what you are worth. I've lived that way my whole life, but you've lived like that so much longer. Fifty whole years you stood there and no one kissed you or carried you or looked inside you to see what was there. But you've given me hope, because even after 50 years, look what happened! Look what a night you just had! Everyone hugged you and kissed you. Everyone wanted to dance with you. You were the star of the show. The Almighty doesn't sleep. He keeps watch over His people, and He's keeping watch over me. "Please, God, I'm begging you, may I be like this Torah scroll. I know there is still holiness in me. Please let me hold onto it, just like this Torah did. And when the time is right, bring me a husband who will honor me and love me the way a wife should be honored. Let me have a home that's happy, and holy, and full of children and guests and kindness, just like this home. Please, God, find me, too, and bring me home."