

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah
October 3 & 4, 2026 *** 22 & 23 Tishrei, 5787

Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah in a Nutshell by Rabbi
Jonathan Sacks z"l

<https://rabbisacks.org/ceremony-celebration-family-edition/shemini-atzeret-simchat-torah-family-edition/>

SHEMINI ATZERET is a strange day in the Jewish calendar. It is described as the eighth day, and thus part of Succot, but it is also designated by a name of its own, Atzeret. Is it, or is it not, a separate festival in its own right? It seems to be both. How are we to understand this?

What guided the Sages was the detail that whereas on the seven days of Succot seventy young bulls were offered in the Temple, on Atzeret, the eighth day, there was only one. Connecting this to Zechariah's prophecy that in the Messianic time all nations would celebrate Succot, they concluded that the seventy sacrifices of Succot represented the seventy nations of the world as described in Chapter 10 of Bereishit. Even though Zechariah's vision had not yet been realised, it was as if all humanity were in some sense present in Jerusalem on the festival, and sacrifices were made on their behalf. On the eighth day, as they were leaving, God was inviting the Jewish people to a small private reception. The word Atzeret itself was interpreted to mean, "Stop, stay a while." Shemini Atzeret was private time between God and His people. It was a day of particularity (between God and His people) after the universality of the seven days of Succot (a festival for all the nations, at least in Messianic times).

In February 1997, then-President of the State of Israel, Ezer Weizman, paid the first, and thus far the only, state visit to Britain as the guest of Her Majesty the Queen. The custom is that on the first night of such a visit the Queen hosts a state banquet at Buckingham Palace. It was, for the Jews present, a unique and moving moment to hear Hatikvah played in the banqueting hall of the Palace, and to hear the Queen propose a toast to the President with the word lechayim.

There is a protocol for such visits. Present are many representative figures, ambassadors, members of the Government and other members of the Royal Family. At the end of the evening, after most of the guests have taken their leave, there is a small and intimate gathering of just a few individuals – on that occasion the Queen, Prince Philip, the Queen Mother, the Prime Minister and a few others – for a more relaxed and personal conversation with the guest of honour. It was this kind of occasion, with its Royal protocol, that best illustrates how the Sages understood Shemini Atzeret.

[SIMCHAT TORAH](#) (celebrated the day after Shemini Atzeret in the Diaspora, and combined into one day in Israel as there is only one day of Yom Tov) is unique among festivals. It is not mentioned in the Torah, nor in the Talmud. Unlike Purim and Chanukah, it was not formalised by any decision on the part of the religious authorities, nor does it commemorate any historical deliverance. It grew from the grassroots, slowly developing over time.

It was born in Babylon, probably at the end of the period of the Amora'im, the Rabbis of the Talmud, in the fifth or sixth century. The Babylonian custom – now universal – was to divide the Torah into fifty-four portions to be read in the course

of a year (in Israel there was a three or three-and-a-half-year cycle). On the second day of Shemini Atzeret in Babylon (there was no second day in Israel), the custom was to read the last portion of the Torah, in which Moshe blessed the nation at the end of his life.

It had long been the custom to make a celebration on completing a section of study, a Talmudic tractate, or an order of the Mishnah (Shabbat 118b). Thus, the custom evolved to make a celebration at the completion of the Mosaic books, and it was considered a great honour to be called to the Torah for this last portion. The celebration became known as Simchat Torah.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shemini Atzeret: Your Separation is Hard For Me
by Rabbi Dr. Susan Hornstein (2023)

It's been a long Tishrei. Dozens of hours spent in prayer, eating, fasting, and socializing. Contemplation, repentance, joy, and perhaps more time thinking about God than all the rest of the year combined. And this last week, sitting in the sukkah, waving the arba minim; it's all been a bit of a marathon. In the days of the Beit HaMikdash, the ideal celebration of Sukkot involved pilgrimage to Jerusalem, for a very intense week of togetherness with God and the Jewish people. And then, tacked onto the end of it all is Shemini Atzeret, seeming almost like an afterthought. Today, we mostly focus on the aspect of Shemini Atzeret involving the

completion and re-inauguration of the yearly cycle of Torah readings, and the celebrations that accompany that. But after all that Yom Tov, why do we really need one more day?

The command to observe an extra day after Sukkot is originally given in Vayikra 23:36:

Seven days you shall bring offerings by fire to Hashem. On the eighth day you shall observe a sacred occasion and bring an offering by fire to Hashem; it is a solemn gathering: you shall not work at your occupations.

Rashi explains that the word **עֲצָרָת**, often translated as “solemn gathering,” is derived from the word for stopping or holding back. He compares God to a king whose children have visited for a week. The king, reluctant to let the children leave, begs them to stay an extra day, using the phrase **“קָשָׁה עָלַי פְּרִדְתְּכֶם”** “your separation is hard for me.” This is a beautiful depiction of God, as eager to have the Jewish people in residence as the Jewish people are to be in God’s presence.

Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman, of the Israeli rabbinical organization Tzohar, explains the concept slightly differently. He points out that the word **פְּרִדְתְּכֶם** means “YOUR separation,” and that if it referred to the departure of the Jewish people from God it might have been rendered “OUR separation.” Rather, he suggests, it is the separation of the Jewish people from one another, after a week of togetherness, that is bothering God. He cites the classic midrash (found in Yalkut Shimoni, Akedat Yitzchak, and Shibbolei Leket) about the arba minim, the four species of Sukkot. The midrash describes each type of vegetation as representing a different type of Jew, those who are learned and those who are not, those who are observant and those who are not. The species can only be waved when they are bundled together into **אֶגְדָּה**

אֶחָד, a single unit. The dispersal of the Jewish people after the holiday, Rabbi Wasserman says, threatens this unity, as everyone goes back to their day-to-day, segregated existence. And this, he suggests, is the tragedy that God seeks to postpone by holding onto the unity for one extra day.

This phrase אֶחָד אֶחָד, a single unit, appears repeatedly in the High Holy Day prayers. There it refers to all of God's creations, all full of awe, coronating God as our Ruler. It is only this unity, this single-hearted service of God, that can create the atmosphere in which, ultimately, we can experience שְׂמֵחָה לְעִירָךְ, joy in Your land and rejoicing in Your city.

We began Tishrei with this lofty goal – to coronate God by recognizing that all God's creations are in this together, leading to a more joyful world. We wrap up the season with God's wistful recognition that the unity might not last. How might we continue in this year of 5784 with the goal of unifying different types of Jews, Jews and non-Jews, humans and God's non-human creations? Can we find ways to continue the unity that brings joy to God and to God's holy city? Our separation from one another is difficult for God. It threatens us, our society and our environment. We have the power to bring more unity into the world, for ourselves and for God.

(Rabbi Dr. Susan is an educator and lifelong learner. She is a founder of the Women's Tefillah Group of Raritan Valley and has been active in the Highland Park, NJ community for over 35 years. She is also a musician and a HaZamir conductor. R' Susan has founded a community, Kol Ami, a welcoming halakhic congregation.)

Simchat Torah: Nothing Great Is Every Finished by
Rabbi Julie Hilton Danan

https://truah.org/resources/julie-hilton-danan-simchat-torah-moraltorah_2026/

This week, we finish reading the Torah, and the conclusion may feel less than satisfying. After we have spent four books following the career of Moses as the leader of our people, God tells Moses to ascend Mt. Nevo in the Jordan Valley, and from there God shows him the whole panorama of the land of Israel. But then, the kicker: "I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not cross there."

Moses dies with a kiss from God and is buried in an unmarked grave. The story of our people will continue without him, yet always with him. Some people say that the book of Joshua, of entering and conquering the land, should be the sixth book of the Torah. But tellingly, we don't read it in full in the synagogue. We are much more riveted by the unfinished business of Moses than the glorious continuation. The unfinished story at the end of the Torah is a continual reminder that even our greatest leader couldn't complete the work, and neither can we.

Moses represents the idealist in each of us. He wants to be in the promised land, with an exemplary society, a holy nation following the Torah. With pain and protest, he learns to be satisfied with just a vision of his dream and with knowing that he has nurtured a successor and generation(s) to come. Many of us are also idealists, and we want to see our hopes for society come to fruition, whether it's true equality for women, healing the environment, or a fully just society. We want to see it all in our lifetimes, but like Moses, we eventually realize that the journey to our ideals may be the destination.

Moses eventually focused on building up his successor and preparing a new generation to go on without him. Because he let go, he lives on. Some 3,400 years later, we still call him,

“Moses our teacher.”

Our tradition of unfinished business doesn't stop with Moses. Fast forward a few centuries, and we have the indelible story of King David, who also had a great project he never got to fulfill. King David ascended to the throne, vanquished Israel's enemies, and made Jerusalem his capital. But his greatest dream was left to the next generation. He didn't get to build the Holy Temple because he had been warlike and shed innocent blood. (Chronicles 1 22:7-10) His son, Solomon, whose name means peace, can build the Temple, a place of peace. King David wanted to build a “house” for God, but he learned, somewhat ironically, that God would be the one to build the “house” for him, meaning, not a fancy building, but people — his family and dynasty. (Samuel II 7:11) And some 3,000 years later, we still sing, “David Melech Yisrael, chai ve-kayam,” “David, King of Israel lives on.”

When I meditate, I'm told to “be here now.” But being happy in the here and now actually depends on knowing that there is something bigger than us that outlasts us. According to philosophy Professor Samuel Scheffler, author of “Why Worry About Future Generations?,” knowing that we aren't the completion, that life continues after us, is critical to our happiness and feelings of value and meaning in the present. He suggests various scenarios, including: If we knew that we would live a great life, but the human race wouldn't last much longer, we would become depressed and lose much of our meaning in life.

According to Professor Scheffler, because we take this belief in the future for granted,

We don't think much about its significance. Yet ...this belief plays an extremely important role in our lives, quietly but

critically shaping our values, commitments, and sense of what is worth doing. Astonishing though it may seem, there are ways in which the continuing existence of other people after our deaths — even that of complete strangers — matters more to us than does our own survival and that of our loved ones.

And that's why knowing that we are part of efforts that may take generations, from scientific discovery to social justice, gives life greater meaning, not less.

This is something secular society seems to be discovering as our future is threatened by climate change. But as Jews, we have always been blessed with a consciousness of the links between generations, what we owe the past and what we want to convey to the future: the chain of tradition, the legacy of values and ideas, the Masoret, literally that which is passed on from one generation to the next.

We aren't Moses or King David. But like Moses, we can devote our whole lives to our ideals, while knowing that we will end up passing the work of a better society to the next generation. Reflecting on King David, we can realize that no matter how impressive our career achievements are, our greatest satisfaction may be the relationships that will live on after us. Knowing that we are doing the best we can to provide a peaceful and just future for generations to come can allow us to truly enjoy the blessings of life, right in the here and now.

(Rabbi Julie Hilton Danan is the religious leader of Seaside Jewish Community in Rehoboth Beach, DE. She is a graduate of the ALEPH Rabbinic program and holds a Ph.D. in Hebrew Studies from the University of Texas at Austin.)

[Dancing with Torah by Amy Kalmanofsky](#)

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/dancing-with-torah-2/>

Judaism's richness comes from having two Torahs—the Written Torah [Torah shebikhtav], which Moses receives from God, and which we will soon celebrate on Simhat Torah, and the Oral Torah [Torah shebe'al peh], the Torah of commentary that extends from the ancient rabbis to today's rabbis, scholars, and students of Judaism's sacred texts and traditions.

The interplay between the written and the oral Torah has sustained the Jewish people over time. Although they debated the proportions and priorities of what to study, the Talmud's rabbis recognized the importance of both the Written and the Oral Torahs [Kiddushin 30a; Baba Metzia 33a]. They understood the sacred dance between the seen and the heard, the read and the taught, the fixed and the fluid.

Even our earliest ancestors participated in this dance. When Israel received revelation at Sinai, the Torah records that the people heard with their eyes (Exod. 20:15), capturing how for one extraordinary moment, Israel had the miraculous capacity to see the audible and hear the visual (see Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael 20:15).

The precious and invigorating dynamic between Written and Oral Torah creates a shared textual tradition while allowing for fresh interpretation. It enables us to honor our ancestors while ensuring transmission to a new generation. Over time, commentary becomes written down and fixed, and teachers become named sages, inspiring new students, teachers, and commentary to be born.

I know this dynamic well and yet have chosen to dance as close as possible to the words of the Written Torah for most of

my career and life. My allegiance to the Torah's written word has been my foundation and security as a Bible scholar and as a Jew. The word, the text, is the anchor that grounds my scholarship, giving weight and context to my interpretations. Staying close to the written word also makes me feel like I engage with Torah as a Jew by participating in the ancient and sacred act of close reading and interpretation that reveals insights organic to the Torah and relevant to our Jewish lives.

Recently, though, I have begun to dance in a different direction. Literally.

For over a year, I have been learning how to tap dance. Tap dancing is a serious discipline and a rich art form with a remarkable history. For me, it has become a joyful and profound practice through which I am participating in a powerful form of oral Torah that I have come to cherish—one that has taught me the essence and value of all forms of oral Torah.

Brian Seibert's masterful history of tap dancing, aptly entitled *What the Eye Hears: A History of Tap Dancing* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), elucidates the transmission of tap dance, its artistry, and its cultural impact. As Seibert chronicles, tap dance began, and essentially remains, an oral Torah. Tap steps were shared and stolen between dancers and passed down between teachers and students.

Students today continue to learn to tap by listening and watching, hearing and seeing their teachers, until they embody their teachers' Torah. This is what makes tap dance thrilling, as well as fleeting in the moment. There is a feeling of reverence in a tap class, as students and teachers engage in a deeply intimate transmission of tradition that goes from body

to body. Students witness and receive their teachers' Torah, physically capturing it, before they interpret it through their bodies and selves.

Torah observed and heard, but not preserved by text, feels direct and alive in a way I have never experienced before. This, I imagine, is what Israel must have experienced at Sinai, and what I would like more of in my Jewish life. At Sinai, Israel received Torah, they did not study it. They witnessed God's Torah and then embodied it. In other words, Israel was dancing at Sinai.

Judaism needs both its oral and written Torah. Jews need a Written Torah that grounds us, honoring our ancestors and preserving their Torah, and an Oral Torah that opens us—our bodies and minds—to new teachers, new Torah, and, as I have discovered, new kinds of Torah.

May we dance with all our Torah this Simhat Torah, and may we continue to dance between the seen and the heard, the studied and the witnessed, the fixed and fluid throughout the Jewish new year. *(Amy Kalmanofsky is Dean, List College and Kekst Graduate School; Blanche and Romie Shapiro Professor, Bible)*

Yahrtzeits

Mel Zwillenberg remembers Susan's mother Trudy Altman on Tuesday October 6th