



Carnegie Shul Chatter

October 7, 2020



Light candles 6:30pm

Shabbas/Shemini Atzeres Services 9:20am

Joy in the Torah!

This weekend, beginning on Friday evening, we will be celebrating Shemini Atzeres and also the holiday of Simchas Torah. The holidays coincide with the final two days of Sukkos and their observance is different in Israel than it is in the Diaspora, so they can be a little confusing, but they are very joyful holidays, although in this, the year of Covid, the celebratory dancing with the

Begin Again

And so, on Simchas Torah, we read the last portion of the Torah, then proceed immediately to the first portion in the Book of Genesis. And to me, that is the bittersweet part of one of our most joyous holidays, Simchas Torah.

Why is it bittersweet? Well, the last portion of the Torah tells us of the death of Moses, the law-giver who led us out of Egypt and dedicated his life to God and the Jewish people.

What an incredible man Moses was. As Chabad.org tells us, "As per G d's instructions, Moses ascended Mount Nebo. Once on top of the mountain, G d showed him all of the Land of Israel. Moses then died, at the age of one hundred and twenty. Until his last moment, his eye never dimmed and his skin never dried. The Israelites mourned Moses for thirty days, and Joshua immediately assumed the mantle of leadership. The Torah concludes with a eulogy for Moses. He was the greatest prophet to ever live, and he performed incredible and awesome miracles before the eyes of all of Israel."

Yes, bittersweet is the passing of Moses, but oh so joyful that after forty years our ancestors finally crossed into the Promised Land, ending their incredible journey following the Exodus from Egypt.

Torahs on Simchas Torah will have to be deferred.

Yizkor is also a part of the services on Shemini Atzeres, so we will be reciting Yizkor in our shul as part of our Shabbos services this Saturday morning.

Here is an explanation of these holidays from Judaism 101.

Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

Tishri 22, the day after the seventh day of Sukkot, is the holiday Shemini Atzeret. In Israel, Shemini Atzeret is also the holiday of Simchat Torah. Outside of Israel, where extra days of holidays are held, only the second day of Shemini Atzeret is Simchat Torah: Shemini Atzeret is Tishri 22 and 23, while Simchat Torah is Tishri 23.

Meaning of the Holidays

These two holidays are commonly thought of as part of Sukkot, but that is technically incorrect; Shemini Atzeret is a holiday in its own right and does not involve some of the special observances of Sukkot. We do not take up the lulav and etrog on these days, and our dwelling in the sukkah is more limited, and performed without reciting a blessing.

Shemini Atzeret literally means “the assembly of the eighth (day).”

Rabbinic literature explains the holiday this way: our Creator is like a host, who invites us as visitors for a limited time, but when the time comes for us to leave, He has enjoyed himself so much that He asks us to stay another day. Another related explanation: Sukkot is a holiday intended for all of mankind, but when Sukkot is over, the Creator invites the Jewish people to stay for an extra day, for a more intimate celebration.

Simchat Torah means “Rejoicing in the Torah.” This holiday marks the completion of the annual cycle of weekly Torah readings. Each week in synagogue we publicly read a few chapters from the Torah, starting with Genesis Ch. 1 and working our way around to Deuteronomy 34. On Simchat Torah, we read the last Torah portion, then proceed immediately to the first chapter of Genesis, reminding us that the Torah is a circle, and never ends.

This completion of the readings is a time of great celebration. There are processions around the synagogue carrying Torah scrolls and plenty of high-spirited singing and dancing in the synagogue with the Torahs. Drinking is also common during this time; in fact, a traditional source recommends performing the priestly blessing earlier than usual in the service, to make sure the kohanim are not drunk when the time comes! As many people as possible are given the honor of an aliyah (reciting a blessing over the Torah reading); in fact, even children are



called for an aliyah blessing on Simchat Torah. In addition, as many people as possible are given the honor of carrying a Torah scroll in these processions. Children do not carry the scrolls (they are much too heavy!), but often follow the procession around the synagogue, sometimes carrying small toy Torahs (stuffed plush toys or paper scrolls).

In some synagogues, confirmation ceremonies or ceremonies marking the beginning of a child's Jewish education are held at this time.

Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are holidays on which work is not permitted.

