

In memory of all those brutally murdered in the war on Israel,
including the fallen soldiers of the IDF

בס"ד

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VOLUME 39 | #5

DAF HASHAVUA

חול המועד
שמיני עצרת
ושמחת תורה

CHOL HAMOED,
SHEMINI ATZERET
& SIMCHAT TORAH

SHABBAT ENDS:

London: 7.03pm	Leeds: 7.08pm
Birmingham: 7.09pm	Liverpool: 7.16pm
Bournemouth: 7.13pm	Manchester: 7.10pm
Cardiff: 7.17pm	Nottingham: 7.09pm
Dublin: 7.26pm	Sheffield: 7.10pm
Edinburgh: 7.14pm	Southend: 6.59pm
Glasgow: 7.18pm	Southport: 7.17pm
Hull: 7.06pm	Jerusalem: 6.48pm

Monday 13 October

A long-lasting candle and candles for
Shemini Atzeret should be lit by:
London: 5.57pm
Jerusalem: 5.33pm

Tuesday 14 October

Candles for Simchat Torah should be lit
from the long-lasting candle after:
London: 6.57pm
Yomtov ends in Jerusalem: 6.45pm

Wednesday 15 October

Yomtov ends in London: 6.55pm

(For other cities, please consult your
local community)



The
United
Synagogue

Torah Reading Summary

SHABBAT CHOL HAMOED

TORAH READING (SHEMOT 33:12-34:26)

Most of this reading is about the reconciliation between God and Israel following the sin of the Golden Calf. God 'descends' to Mount Sinai, passes in front of Moshe - who is concealed in the 'cleft of the rock' - and declares the thirteen principles of His mercy. The reading concludes with the obligation of Israel to 'go up and appear before God' on the festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succot.

MAFTIR (BEMIDBAR 29:26-31)

The maftir for Shabbat Chol Hamoed comes from parashat Pinchas and contains details of the special offerings that were brought on Succot.

HAFTARAH (YEHEZKEL 38:18-39:16)

The haftarah for Shabbat Chol Hamoed is from the prophet Yechezkel (Ezekiel) and speaks about the future war of Gog and Magog against Israel, leading to the final redemption and the Messianic era. Yechezkel prophesied in great detail about the war and the miraculous defeat of the attackers, emphasising the sanctification of God's name.

SHEMINI ATZERET

TORAH READING (DEVARIM 14:22-16:17)

Outside Israel¹, the Torah Reading for Shemini Atzeret refers to the Second Tithe, the mitzvah of helping the poor with their needs, and the celebration of the three pilgrim festivals, Pesach, Shavuot and Succot.

The Second Tithe was produce that the farmer had to eat 'in the place where God

chooses to rest His Name' or to exchange it for money, which he would then take to 'the place of God's choosing' and spend the money there on food. It had to be eaten in that same location.

Similarly, the pilgrim festivals had to be celebrated 'in the place of God's choosing'. This 'place of God's choosing' ultimately referred to the Temple in Jerusalem, but prior to that it referred to Shiloh, where the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) was located for 369 years. This is one reason why the Torah does not name the place.

The Torah refers to the mitzvah of *simcha* (happiness) on Shavuot and Succot, and the obligation to include the less fortunate amongst us in our celebrations.

MAFTIR (BEMIDBAR 29:35-30:1)

The Maftir reading is the same as on Simchat Torah and can be seen below.

HAFTARAH (I KINGS 8:54-9:1)

The Haftarah contains the conclusion of the celebration of the dedication of the First Temple and King Solomon's majestic words on that occasion, a heartfelt prayer that God would always be with His people, and that we, His people, would always follow His ways.

SIMCHAT TORAH

TORAH READING (DEVARIM 33,34)

The second day of Shemini Atzeret (in the Diaspora) is Simchat Torah, and we read from three scrolls. From the first, we conclude the Torah with the parasha of *Vezot Haberachah*,

which sets out Moshe's blessings to the tribes just prior to his death. This parasha ends with Moshe's death and God's eulogy to him, describing Moshe as '*Ish Elokim*', a man of God, and '*eved Hashem*', a servant of God.

BEREISHIT (1:1-2:3)

Having completed the Torah, we immediately begin a new cycle of Torah reading, so that we are always immersed in the weekly parasha. We therefore read from the second scroll the Torah's account of Creation. There is a widespread custom for the entire congregation to sing the last words of each paragraph out loud and the last paragraph in its entirety (*Vayechulu Hashamayim...*), publicly acknowledging our belief in God as Creator and Master of the world, and in Shabbat as the pinnacle of Creation.

MAFTIR (BEMIDBAR 29:35-30:1)

From the third scroll, we read the Maftir, which refers to the special offerings which were brought on Shemini Atzeret. During Succot, a total of 70 bulls were offered, representing the seventy nations of Israel, whereas on Shemini Atzeret only one bull was offered, representing the one, unique nation of Israel.

HAFTARAH (YEHOSHUA 1:1-18)

The Haftarah is from the beginning of the book of Yehoshua (Joshua). As Joshua takes on the reins of leadership following Moses' death, he is charged with bringing the Israelites into the Land of Israel, and is told '*chazak ve'ematz*', be strong and of good courage!

¹ In Israel, Shemini Atzeret is Simchat Torah, all on one day, and the Torah and Haftarah readings are those of Simchat Torah.



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United Synagogue Daf Hashavua

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KOHELET: THE DISCONCERTING GUEST

BY: **SHIRA JACKSON**

US Education

Imagine Kohelet (aka King Solomon) as a guest at your Succot table. He does not arrive with flowers or a bottle of wine. He brings questions. Big ones. The kind that make you pause mid-bite and wonder: What am I really doing with my life?

He listens quietly as the conversation flows – about work, school, politics, plans. And then, gently, he leans in and says: *“Hevel havalim, hakol hevel”* (Kohelet 1:2). “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,” is not just a philosophical musing. It is a mirror held up to our lives, asking us to confront the uncomfortable truth: permanence is an illusion.

King Solomon, the author traditionally associated with writing *Kohelet*, was granted divine wisdom. Yet in this book, he does not offer certainty – he offers questions. The word *hevel* is often translated as ‘vanity,’ but that misses its poetic subtlety. It is breath. Vapour. A mist that appears and disappears. *Kohelet* does not dismiss life – it dignifies its transience. It invites us to find holiness not in what lasts forever, but in what flickers and fades.

Breath of breaths, everything is breath.

Kohelet is not trying to ruin the mood. He is trying to deepen it. He wants us to look beyond the surface and ask: What endures? What matters when the noise quiets and the lights dim?

One of *Kohelet’s* most famous passages is *“To everything there is a season...”* (3:1). It is not just poetic – it is practical theology. It teaches us to honour the rhythm of life. That joy and grief, silence and speech, building and breaking – all have their time. In a world that demands constant productivity, *Kohelet* offers permission to pause. To be present.

As an educator, I often see how we crave certainty. We want Torah to give us answers, not riddles. But *Kohelet* offers something more profound: the courage to live with ambiguity. *“I said I would be wise, but it was far from me”* (7:23). Even Solomon, the wisest of men, admits that some truths lie beyond our grasp. This is not despair – it is humility. It is the recognition that the most profound spiritual growth comes not from knowing, but from wondering yet still choosing to live with purpose.

“Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart, for God has already approved your deeds” (9:7). It is not an invitation to indulgence – it is a call to presence. To live with intention. To recognise that holiness is not only found in Shul, but also at the dinner table, in laughter shared, and in the quiet acts of kindness that no one sees.

During Succot, we dwell in impermanence. The succah sways. The stars peek through. And we

“ Kohelet does not dismiss life – it dignifies its transience. It invites us to find holiness not in what lasts forever, but in what flickers and fades.”

read *Kohelet*, a text that gently shakes us. It does not offer walls of certainty – it offers windows of insight. Faith is not about having all the answers. It is about trusting the One who does.

So, as we invite in our disconcerting guest, *Kohelet*, this Succot, let us allow its words to unsettle us, to challenge us, and ultimately, to deepen us. Let us embrace the fragility of life not with fear, but with faith. Let us not rush to resolve its tensions, but rather, let us dwell in them, finding meaning not in permanence, but in presence. Because in that dwelling – in that sacred discomfort – we just might find the beginnings of wisdom.





WHEN JOY TURNS INWARD

BY: **REBBETZEN DINA GOLKER**

Magen Avot

After weeks of intense spiritual energy – from the awe of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and the festivity of Succot – Shemini Atzeret arrives modestly. It has no succah, no lulav, no unique mitzvah of its own. And yet, in many ways, it represents the pinnacle of this entire sacred season.

The Rabbis in the Midrash famously compare it to a king whose children have come to visit him. As they are about to leave, the king pleads: “Stay one more day – it’s hard for me to part with you!” Unlike Succot, which is universal in nature, as evidenced by the seventy offerings made for the seventy nations of the world, Shemini Atzeret is uniquely intimate. It is just between us and God.

Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (1823-1900) explains that Succot celebrates the joy of *olam hazeh*, the physical world – we sit in temporary huts, invite guests, and celebrate nature’s bounty. Shemini Atzeret, by contrast, is about joy beyond the physical. It is a joy rooted in spiritual closeness, in relationship, in simply *being* with God – not through action, but through presence.

This idea resonates deeply in our time, where people are discovering the limitations of external happiness. Despite unprecedented access to comfort and entertainment, professional studies reveal rising levels of

anxiety, loneliness and burnout. Just this summer, global headlines reported record-breaking mental health crises among teens and young adults. The UK’s recent national “loneliness strategy” is a clear acknowledgement that modern society is technologically connected more than ever before, yet relationally we are depleted. We are good at celebrating success and knowing how to enjoy physical comforts, but struggle with quiet presence. Shemini Atzeret gently invites us back to the joy of connection without distraction, reminding us that there is a state of happiness that comes not from doing more, but from simply being with purpose.

Simchat Torah, which, in Israel, coincides with Shemini Atzeret, reinforces this shift from external to internal. As Rav Hillel Lichtenstein (1814-1891) observes, whilst the honour of *Chatan Torah* is traditionally reserved for a *Talmid Chacham*, someone who has completed the entire Torah, *Chatan Bereishit* – the person who starts the Torah – can be anyone. This is because the *beginning* of the new cycle focuses on the future. Everyone has an opportunity, both through learning and supporting Torah, to make the coming year one of Torah study; beginning is open to all.

For women, Simchat Torah is also a great opportunity. In our shul we celebrate with a beautiful

“ Shemini Atzeret gently invites us back to the joy of connection without distraction, reminding us that there is a state of happiness that comes not from doing more, but from simply being with purpose.”

morning of women’s learning and breakfast, sharing Torah insights, inspiration and heartfelt discussion, with each speaker offering words that resonate profoundly. Last year’s theme reflected the tragedies of the previous Simchat Torah in Israel.

Shemini Atzeret tells us: do not rush away over-hastily. Let the meaning of the past year settle and reflect on it to make next year better. In a fast-moving world, we need this pause – to reflect not only on what we have or have not done, but on whom we want to become. There is not a huge fanfare for Shemini Atzeret, but quiet reflection and a hidden symbolic meaning in the way we celebrate it.

As we celebrate the Torah and start again, may we internalise this message: true joy does not always need a stage, but demands reflection, understanding and a wish to be closer to God.



THE DANCING CIRCLE AS A CONNECTION TO AM YISRAEL

BY: **RABBI NICKY LISS**

Highgate Synagogue and Director of CRE (Centre for Rabbinic Excellence)

To my mind, one of the most powerful images of Succot, Hoshana Rabba and Simchat Torah, is that of a circle.

On each day of Succot, we take our *Lulav* and *Etrog* and encircle the *Bimah* and a *Sefer Torah* once, as we recite *Hoshanot*. On Hoshana Rabba, we do this seven times with seven *Sifrei Torah* and this reaches a crescendo when, on Simchat Torah, we circle the *Bimah* in joyful dance, rather than walking, and the *Sifrei Torah* also join the circle, rather than remaining in the middle.

I once heard an incredibly meaningful reason for the circle based on the writings of the Maharal of Prague (c.1525-1609). The Talmud (Taanit 31a) teaches that in the time to come, the righteous will form a circle around God in the Garden of Eden. It is

then that each and every righteous individual will point at God with his finger and declare, "This is my God; we will rejoice in His salvation." The circle which we form is symbolic of the great circle of the future.

In this sense, the Maharal explains, the act of dancing in a circle demonstrates that each member is equally close to the centre. This equidistance of each individual to the centre simultaneously validates each one's connection to that which exists in the middle, as a circle is a space defined by an uninterrupted line; every point that radiates from its centre is equal.

American author and educator Dr Erica Brown develops this idea and suggests that the circle as a dance allows entry to each person and expands the circle while retaining this inherent sense of equality. Everyone in a dance circle can see one another, no matter how far apart.

The circle as a dance is a place of joy and belonging, not a place of hierarchy with sharp corners and support scaffolding. It is a place of intense activity and membership regardless of stature and means – it maintains a consistent centre as it invites expansiveness.

The circle as a metaphor for community is a very powerful one.

It is shocking to think that when we celebrate Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah this year we will be marking two long, lonely, heartbreaking and painful years since 7 October. Dan Senior, in his *Call Me Back* podcast, often quotes Dr Mijal Bitton, who reflects that this pain we are feeling at the moment is 'peoplehood'. The imagery of the circle allows us to process this and remind ourselves how connected we are to every member of *Am Yisrael*, the Jewish People. We cannot afford to forget this, and we need to continue to strengthen those ties.

When we circle the *Bimah* this year, whether during Succot or on Simchat Torah, let us call out to God to bring our hostages (if God forbid any are still being held captive when this goes to print) and our brave soldiers back home, so that we may all be privileged to dance together in the great circle of the future as described in the Talmud.

“ The circle as a dance is a place of joy and belonging, not a place of hierarchy... It maintains a consistent centre as it invites expansiveness. The circle as a metaphor for community is a very powerful one.”





A LIFE OF SERVICE

BY: **RABBI DOVI LEBRETT**

Shenley United Jewish Community

On a modest gravestone nestled in the hills of Jerusalem, a simple yet striking epitaph is engraved.

Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, who passed away in April 2015, was among the greatest and most influential rabbis of our time. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks described him as “the finest exponent of Torah and wisdom in our generation.” In addition to his towering Torah scholarship, he held a PhD in English Literature and received the prestigious Israel Prize.

Beyond his intellectual brilliance, Rabbi Lichtenstein was renowned for his extraordinary kindness. For years, he cared devotedly for his elderly, blind father. At his funeral, not only his family, friends and students came to mourn, but also the cleaning staff of the yeshiva in which he taught – sobbing for their loss as if they had lost a beloved relative.

What might one expect to find engraved on his tombstone? Perhaps a tribute to his scholarly achievements and his published works, or his countless acts of kindness. Yet Rabbi Lichtenstein requested only two Hebrew words: **“Oved Hashem” – “A Servant of God.”**

This week’s Torah portion describes Moshe’s (Moses) death with a similar phrase: “and Moshe, **the servant of God**, died there.”¹

This is Moshe, who risked his

life to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt, guided them through the wilderness for forty years, and pleaded with God for mercy after their numerous failures. Moshe, who received the Torah at Sinai and performed extraordinary miracles. While the Torah indeed praises Moshe as the greatest prophet who has and will ever live, when it records his death, it gives him only this title: “A Servant of God.” To our modern ears, the word “servant” sounds diminutive, suggesting a lack of autonomy or agency. Why is this the Torah’s greatest accolade?

Next week’s Torah portion, as we come full circle to The Beginning, recounts the first sin: Adam and Eve eating from the Tree of Knowledge in defiance of God’s command. This act set the pattern for all future sin – the ongoing struggle between human ego and divine will, between asserting our own power and desire for freedom and surrendering to God’s command.

By the Torah’s end, Moshe had, in some sense, reversed Adam’s mistake. He set aside his ego completely, dedicating every moment to divine service. He teaches us the ultimate lesson: we become as great as the cause to which we devote ourselves, and the highest achievement is to live one’s entire life as a servant of God. This sounds difficult and uncomfortable

and is tough to master.

Rabbi Lichtenstein himself beautifully expressed this idea:

“No area of life, no sphere of endeavour, should be divorced from serving God. There is nothing neutral. Whatever a person does, wherever he is, he can strive to structure his life so that it is ultimately geared toward being a servant of God.”

In the end, for the greatest and humblest of leaders, the truest crown is not titles or accomplishments or accolades, but the simple identity: **“A Servant of God.”**



The gravestone of Rabbi Lichtenstein

¹ It seems that, in his humility, Rabbi Lichtenstein preferred the term “Oved Hashem” (one who serves God), perhaps reserving the definitive “Eved Hashem” (servant of God) for Moshe Rabbeinu alone.

THE TRIBE WEEKLY

SIMCHAT TORAH

14-15 OCTOBER | 23 TISHREI

FLAG SAMEACH!



BY: **RICHARD VERBER**

United Synagogue
Director of
Communications

Many Jewish children march with colourful flags on Simchat Torah, the day we celebrate finishing and re-starting the reading of the Torah. Where does this flag custom come from?

Hundreds of years ago, people held big parades on Simchat Torah, with adults sometimes carrying burning torches or candles to welcome the *Chatan Bereishit* and *Chatan Torah*. This seems to have developed from an ancient custom to escort a bride and groom to the chuppah with candles. The torch procession went round the shul with the *Sifrei Torah* seven times too, possibly echoing the bride circling

the groom under the chuppah.

Some rabbis were opposed to using torches on *Yom Tov* so the custom spread to give them to children to carry! Often children walked in a procession with a candle on top of a flag. Sometimes, flags even had apples with candles on top! The Torah is often compared to light. The verse in the Book of Proverbs says that "a *mitzvah* is a candle and Torah is light" (*Mishlei* 6:23).

The candles custom stopped, perhaps out of concern that children might get burnt or because of a fire risk in wooden synagogues, so children would just carry flags.

Carrying flags on Simchat Torah dates back to at least the eighteenth century. This tradition may also be connected to parade traditions, like soldiers marching with their banners or being a member of a workers' guild or society.

In the desert, each of the 12 tribes of the Children of Israel had their own flag and insignia. Judah's flag had a lion, reflecting strength and royalty. Issachar's symbol was the sun and moon representing their knowledge of astronomy.

Some rabbis explained that our flags show children that they are "soldiers of the Torah", proudly marching to celebrate their connection to Jewish tradition and learning. In many towns, marching with flags was a way for Jewish children to feel important and included in the festival.

In many United Synagogue communities, children still march with flags, whether homemade, decorated in school or provided by Tribe. Singing, dancing and joining in the celebration of the Torah unites Jewish communities all over the world. However you're celebrating this year, *Chag Sameach!*

Guess the flag!

How many of these flags found around Israel can you identify?

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THE TRIBE SCRIBE

SIMCHAT TORAH: TIMELESS TREASURE!

ON **SIMCHAT TORAH** WE CELEBRATE THE TIMELESS TREASURE OF OUR **TORAH**. DID YOU KNOW THAT SOME **SIFREI TORAH** (TORAH SCROLLS) HAVE BEEN ON JOURNEYS MORE EPIC THAN SUPERHEROES?



CHECK OUT THESE INCREDIBLE **TORAH** SCROLLS STORED SAFELY IN **ISRAEL'S** NATIONAL LIBRARY!

A TORAH IN A MOSQUE!

On the island of **Rhodes** in **Greece**, Nazis tried to wipe out the **Jewish** community. A kind Muslim leader bravely hid their **Torah** under the pulpit of a mosque until it was safe to return it.



KEEP SCROLLING!

Not all the library's scrolls stay locked up! There's a 200-year-old **Torah** that's still read regularly during services. Amazingly, it once belonged to the great-great-great-great-grandfather of one of the librarians.



TORAH TIME-TRAVELLERS

The collection has **Torah** scrolls over 1,000 years old! Parchment pieces from a **Yemenite Torah** were found sewn inside old book covers. They might be small fragments, but a quick glance at them shows it's clear that the words haven't changed!

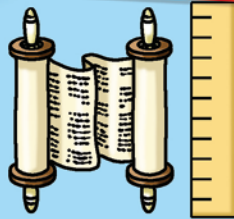


SPAIN → GREECE → ISRAEL

The **Rhodes Torah** had already survived being carried out of **Spain** when **Jews** were kicked out in 1492. Then it sailed across the sea to **Greece**, and finally found a forever home in **Jerusalem**.

KING FOR A DAY

Legend states that a **Jew** named **Saul Wahl** became king of **Poland**... but only for **ONE** day! He had a tiny **Torah** (only 10 cm tall!) that may have been with him when he wore the crown.



SOLDIERS AND SCROLLS

Jewish soldiers who fought the Nazis also rescued **Jewish** books and scrolls. Some ended up in the library after years of hiding, collecting dust, and even dangerous smuggling.



OLD WORDS, NEW TORAH

The library now has a brand-new **Torah** written specially for its new building. It might be new parchment and ink, but the words inside are exactly the same as every **Torah** in the library's vault, and every **Torah** ever written!



THESE SCROLLS ALL TELL DIFFERENT STORIES... BUT THE REAL SUPERPOWER IS THAT THE **TORAH'S** TIMELESS TEACHINGS ARE STILL AS RELEVANT TO US TODAY!



THE **TORAH** HAS MARCHED WITH US THROUGH DESERTS, ACROSS EXILES, AND BACK TO OUR LAND OF **ISRAEL**. EACH SCROLL HAS ITS OWN JOURNEY - TOGETHER THEY TELL THE STORY OF ONE PEOPLE. THE **TORAH** IS OUR ULTIMATE NEVER-ENDING STORY, AND YOU'RE PART OF THE SEQUEL!



tribe
www.tribeuk.com

Tribe is the Young People's Department of the United Synagogue: Creating a future for our community through engaging, educating and inspiring the next generation.