

3 OCTOBER 2026 | 23 TISHREI 5787

VOLUME 40 | #5

DAF HASHAVUA

שמיני עצרת | SHEMINI ATZERET ושמחת תורה & SIMCHAT TORAH

CANDLE LIGHTING:

A long-lasting candle and candles for Shabbat and Shemini Atzeret should be lit by:

London: 6.22pm

Jerusalem: 5:47pm

Candles for Simchat Torah

should be lit from the long-lasting candle after Shabbat ends in **London** at 7.21pm

Yom Tov ends:

London: Sunday, 7.18pm

Jerusalem, Saturday, 6.58pm

(for other cities, please consult your local community)



TORAH READING SUMMARY

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 the world, 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

Produced by US Education & Events together with the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue

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SHEMINI ATZERET: IT'S TIME FOR GESHEM!

BY: **RABBI MICHAEL LAITNER**

US Director of Education & Head of Research at the Rabbi Sacks Legacy

After the sweltering temperatures we experienced this summer, the prayer for *geshem* (heavy winter rains which are absorbed into the ground) might resonate more than usual.

In Israel, especially for those involved in agriculture, good rainfall is celebrated and is a significant component of our prayers for a good livelihood.

Why are we praying on Shemini Atzeret for beneficial *geshem*, what do we say and what can we learn from this?

The power of *geshem*

Unlike Egypt, which, historically, was irrigated by the flooding of the Nile, the Land of Israel does not have a 'guaranteed' water source. Instead, we must turn to God and pray for this blessing, never taking it for granted¹. *Geshem*, as referenced in the Torah, can either be destructive or beneficial. It is used both to describe the 40 days of rain during the time of Noah (Noah²) and the catalyst to help crops grow³.

Succot and *geshem*

According to the *Mishna*⁴, Succot is the time when the world

is judged for rain ahead of the impending winter. Elsewhere, the *Mishna*⁵ teaches that we must pray for *geshem* on *Shemini Atzeret*, rather than earlier on in Succot which is when we want to sit in the Succah undisturbed by rain.

Understanding the prayer

The best-known part of the prayer is *mashiv haruach umorid hagashelem*, "Who causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall," which is said in the silent Musaf Amidah following an announcement prior to Musaf. These words are then recited in every Amidah prayer until after the silent Musaf on the first day of Pesach.

Unexpectedly, they are a statement of praise, not a request for rain, and are contained in the second *beracha* of the Amida, whose main theme is our belief in resurrection of the dead. This placement is deliberate since good *geshem* sustains and revives us and we praise God for this. It is only later on into the winter season that the weekday prayers change to actually ask for rain ("tal umatar").

The liturgy of *geshem*

The practice in many

communities is for the chazzan to recite a dramatic, often tuneful, prayer for *geshem* in the style of the *Yamim Noraim* (High Holy Days). It quotes Biblical and rabbinic references to some of our great figures, such as Avraham, Yitzchak and Moshe in relation to water and its impact on them, whilst also describing the role water played during Bnei Yisrael's time in the desert. Echoing prayers of the *Yamim Noraim*, we ask God to remember us for good, as He remembers those ancestors for good.

This prayer is not uniform across Jewish communities and does not appear in the authoritative *Shulchan Aruch* (the Code of Jewish law, 16th century). Its recitation was designed to highlight the significance of this moment and of *geshem* in our history, practice and faith.

Geshem and livelihood are, of course, in God's control, not ours. May He answer our prayers for the good.

1 *Devarim* 11:12

2 *Bereishit* 7:12

3 *Vayikra* 26:4

4 *Rosh Hashanah* 1:2

5 *Ta'anit* 1:1



YIZKOR AND THE SEVENTH OF OCTOBER

BY: **GIDEON SYLVESTER**

United Synagogue Rabbi, Israel

As Yom Tov ended on the 7 October 2023, I called my son who was studying in Sderot, not far from Gaza. Ariel did not answer. A moment later, he texted me. "Dad, Hamas terrorists are standing outside my building. I cannot speak, I cannot switch on the lights, I cannot even use the toilet".

Until October 7, when terrorists entered Israel the threat was quickly dealt with by the Israeli army, so I was not overly alarmed. But this was different. I had no idea of the scale of the attack or how close I came to becoming one of those parents mourning loved ones who were murdered or crying out and campaigning for family members who were kidnapped to Gaza. Reading my son's message was a powerful reminder of our mortality.

Bill Bryson is an American journalist and author. In the introduction to his bestselling *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, he discusses human existence from a secular perspective. Viewing life from a scientific perspective, he notes that, "if you were to pick

yourself apart with tweezers, one atom at a time, you would produce a mound of fine atomic dust". Then, he says, when we pass away after an average of approximately 750,000 hours of life, our atoms close down, silently disassemble and go off to be other things. And that's it for us.

Judaism sees things very differently. Our mourning rituals and the recitation of Yizkor at festivals, declare our belief that each of us is made in the image of God and blessed with eternal life. At Yizkor, we don't just remember our family members, we also recall generations of Jewish martyrs. Tragically, this year, the list is ever longer as we mourn the babies, grandparents, civilians and soldiers murdered on October 7 and in the ensuing battles. We ask that their souls and those of our loved ones be bound up in the bond of eternal life.

Remembering those we have lost, we pledge donations to charity, because as we reflect on the good deeds of the deceased, we strive to continue their legacy by building a better future.

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Alongside our grief, we also focus on more hopeful events. This week also marks the anniversary of Hoshana Rabbah, Monday, 13 October 2025. On that day, two years after Hamas' brutal attack, the final twenty living hostages were released. One of them, Yosef Chaim Ohana, was pressured to convert to Islam. During this stressful time in the terror tunnels, he covertly listened to an Israeli news programme, on a radio that was supposed to be for listening to Muslim prayers. That day, the news bulletin included an interview with his father. Hearing his father's voice empowered Yosef to withstand the torment. When he was finally freed, his father greeted him with a lulav and etrog. He had purchased them for Yosef in the belief that when he was released, he would overcome his exhaustion to fulfil the mitzva of the Four Species. In this way, Yosef proudly connected himself to generations of Jews celebrating Succot.



BITTERSWEETS

BY: **SHIRA JACKSON**

US Education

There's a moment on Simchat Torah that makes me cry each year without fail. With all the noise of kids excitedly swapping sweets, it's easy to miss. The men are huddled in small groups, each surrounding a Sefer Torah, reading the final few verses of the Torah, taking it in turns so each man gets called up to the Torah for an Aliyah. In those last lines, even though the verses are almost drowned out by the *balagan*, Moshe (Moses), the greatest, most humble leader we ever had, the only prophet to speak to God face to face, quietly slips away.

We've followed him from birth, travelled with him from the Nile to the palace, from Midian to Pharaoh's court, from the Reed Sea to Mount Sinai. We watched him carry a nation, argue for them, teach them, love them, and then be told he wouldn't enter the land with them.

Throughout *Sefer Devarim*, we've heard his final speeches, his blessings, his heartbreak and his hopes, and we feel close to him. It feels jarring therefore that the moment we read "And Moshe, the servant of God, died there", is the noisiest, happiest day in shul. Part of me wants to stand

still for a moment, to honour him, to sit with the loss. Surely Moshe *Rabbeinu* (our teacher) deserves our silence, our respect, our mourning.

But then comes the reassurance. Not only do we turn back to *Bereishit*, which is its own kind of comfort – the excitement of creation, the promise of renewal – but the story itself doesn't end with Moshe. The *haftarah* opens with Yehoshua (Joshua) standing at the edge of the Jordan, poised to lead the people forward into the land. A new leader, a new generation, a new stage of the same journey. The Torah may have ended, but the narrative of *Am Yisrael*, the Jewish people, continues without missing a beat.

The contrast between God's relationship with Moshe and Yehoshua is immediate and telling. When God first calls Moshe, He speaks gently, answering every doubt. But to Yehoshua, God says, "Be strong and resolute... do not be terrified nor dismayed." Moshe is shaped through reassurance; Yehoshua is shaped through firm expectation. The relationship has matured.

And the people have evolved

too. The same nation that spent forty years resisting Moshe now says to Yehoshua, "Just as we obeyed Moshe, so will we obey you." It is almost comically revisionist, but it reveals something important: they have learned from their past and are ready to move forward.

Simchat Torah is a day where two emotions can sit together without cancelling each other out. We can grieve and dance in the same breath, as we read in *Kohelet*.

We simultaneously turn back to *Bereishit* and forward to *Sefer Yehoshua*, and somehow both directions feel right. Beginnings and endings are not opposites. The end of Moshe's life and the start of Yehoshua's leadership sit side by side.

In Judaism time does not move in straight lines. We circle back, but never to the same place. We may return to *Bereishit*, back to the beginning, but never as beginners; we've changed. We've been shaped by the awe of Rosh Hashanah, the honesty of Yom Kippur, the joy and vulnerability of Succot. Like Yehoshua, we inherit what came before us and carry it forward into what comes next.

TORAH



Read between the lines:

A traditional Sefer Torah (scroll) contains exactly

304,805

Hebrew letters and not one vowel.



Beauty: It takes a highly trained scribe (a *Sofer*) about

12 to 18

months to hand write a single Torah scroll with a quill.



A tale of two timelines: *Bereishit* is the longest book of the Torah (1,533 verses) and documents approximately

2,300

years. All the other four books together cover just 40 years.

All or nothing:

1

wrong letter invalidates the whole scroll, until it is repaired.

& the beast: A Torah is made of

62 to 84

sheets of parchment, produced from the skin of kosher animals. The sheets are stitched together using threads of sinew.

Encore!: We read the Torah from beginning to end over the course of a year, finishing and immediately restarting the cycle on Simchat Torah.

A full house:

A verse in *Shemot* (16:16) contains all

22

letters of the Aleph Bet at least once.

The heart of the

matter: Torah literally means "instruction" "teaching" or "guidance". This reflects its broad role as a guide to life rather than merely a legal code.

Intervention: The scribe scrapes off the ink with a knife if a mistake is made.

Divine Intervention: An entire panel of parchment must be cut out and sewn anew if a mistake is made in the writing of the name of God.



DID YOU KNOW?

THE TRIBE WEEKLY

SIMCHAT TORAH

3-4 OCTOBER | 23 TISHREI

HARD WORK PAID OFF



BY: **LEO WEINER**

Youth Director,
Finchley United
Synagogue

Chag Sameach! Simchat Torah is an amazing day on which we celebrate our Torah, which has strengthened the Jewish people for 3,000 years. However, every year I find myself wondering why only a few months ago we celebrated Shavuot, another festival centred around the Torah. What is the difference between these two occasions?

The Talmud in *Shabbat* (88a) famously teaches that when God gave the Torah at Sinai, He held the mountain over the Jewish people and compelled them to accept it. The message is that, as well as being a human pursuit, the Torah is primarily a gift from God. As much as we can choose to learn Torah, at the end of the day, it is a gift whose laws we are obligated to keep.

Simchat Torah, however, celebrates what we have done with the gift of Torah. Today marks the completion of the annual Torah cycle, where we have taken the gift of Torah and

learnt from it. Every week.

These two *Chagim* celebrate two distinct aspects of our relationship with Torah. On the one hand, we are grateful for the Torah, a way of life, a text which has given so much to the intellectual character of our people. On the other hand, Torah is not something which comes to us easily. We struggle with the Hebrew, the grammar and more. Today we celebrate the effort we put into making the Torah our own. So enjoy and have a (non-alcoholic) L'Chaim!

Parasha Wordsearch

Find these words in the grid. The words can go in any direction and can share letters as they cross over each other.

I	Q	L	E	A	R	N	I	N	G	K	B	P	V	R
Z	M	Q	L	P	L	Z	Q	E	M	E	Z	U	O	P
M	M	E	Y	J	W	A	V	J	W	E	F	Y	B	Y
Y	U	F	W	U	D	U	V	N	T	G	H	H	R	Q
T	H	Y	I	N	L	C	R	A	O	O	Q	S	J	Z
Y	G	I	I	U	R	T	Y	D	R	E	K	D	E	O
F	C	R	U	S	E	W	O	D	A	N	C	I	N	G
B	P	H	A	S	P	V	T	F	H	W	R	G	O	B
D	E	B	A	X	H	O	U	C	A	L	I	Y	A	H
S	N	N	L	T	U	H	L	F	O	K	J	Z	W	J
W	W	B	C	I	A	Q	O	W	W	B	A	N	X	P
Z	W	E	B	U	L	N	U	X	X	F	W	H	H	O
V	A	T	E	L	K	S	K	L	K	Z	A	B	V	W
P	Y	N	A	T	F	Z	D	X	Z	K	V	T	S	T
D	O	I	I	Y	S	R	X	F	E	T	P	J	E	Y

ALIYAH

CHATAN

DANCING

GESHEM

HAKAFOT

LEARNING

SIYUM

SWEETS

TORAH



THE TRIBE SCRIBE

Through the River Jordan... on Dry Land!

