

Ha Shavuah B' Sha'arey Israel

October 8 – October 15, 2009

20 Tishri – 27 Tishri 5770



Candle lighting time 6:52 pm
Friday October 9

Friday Evening Kabbalat Shabbat Services begin at 6:15 pm
Saturday morning Shabbat Services begin at 9:00 am

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## Shemini Atzeret

Deuteronomy 14:22–16:17; Numbers 29:35–30:1  
Commentary on Page 3

## Simchat Torah

Deuteronomy 33:1 - 34:12; Genesis 1:1 - 2:3; Numbers 29:35 - 30:1  
Commentary on Page 5



**We wish a Happy Birthday this week to:**

Daniel Cohen, Mamie Dayan, Benjamin Katz, Jami Gaudet, Alan Schwaber and Aidan Brody

**Happy Anniversary this week to:**

Meredith & Marc Lipson

**This week we remember the Yahrzeit of:**

Sarah Torch, Roslyn Hirsh Dayan, A.C. Farb, Norman Solanch, William Wall, Kathleen Planer, Morris Gordon, Leon George Rabinowitz

*Shemini Atzeret - Yizkor Service*  
*Saturday morning - October 10 - 9:00 am*

*Simchat Torah Service & Dinner*  
*Saturday evening - October 10 - 6:15 pm*  
*Service on Sunday morning - October 11 - 9:00 am*

**Special Congregation Meeting**  
at the Synagogue  
**Sunday - October 25<sup>th</sup> - 4:00 P.M.**  
Topic: Rabbi's Contract Renewal

*Please be sure to pick up your CSI 2009-2010 Directory!  
They are in the foyer facing the courtyard.*

***CSI 5770 Campaign***

There are still some members who have not made a commitment to the CSI Campaign. This synagogue belongs to all of us and we encourage everyone to be a part of this campaign in whatever way you are able.

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Eric Chanin, brother of Ina Chanin has started his Bone Marrow Transplant this week and will need platelets or blood during the course of his recovery. This is handled through Atlanta Blood Services, which has 2 locations. One is next to Northside Hospital, and the other is on Cobb Parkway next to Whitewater.

If you can donate please call 404-459-8744 and ask for a donor coordinator to set up an appointment time. They will prescreen you.

The Congregation, Ina and Louis appreciate your help.

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Jan Lewis is directing an all female production of Shakespeare's play Twelfth Night, set in the 1960s, at Wesleyan College. The production is at 8:00 pm, Thursday - Saturday, October 15-17, at the Wesleyan Porter Auditorium. General admission is \$8.00. Bibb County public school students are admitted free. Reservations are not required.

Email Jan Lewis at [JLewis@Wesleyancollege.edu](mailto:JLewis@Wesleyancollege.edu) with any questions, or call the Wesleyan College Theatre Dept. at 757-5259.

**The Jewish Federation of Macon and Middle Georgia is sponsoring an educational program on Thursday, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 6:30 PM at the Cox Capital Theatre.**

**We will have pizza and beer followed by special speaker Micah Halpern. Mr. Halpern is an expert on terrorism and has insights you have not thought about. He will speak on “Making Sense of the Muddy Middle East.” More information will follow in a separate flyer.**

**We hope you can attend. You can make a reservation with David Frolich or Harriette Carter.**

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**JR. CONGREGATION IS SATURDAY – OCTOBER 17 – 10:00 AM**  
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**Please complete the End of Life Questionnaire and return them to the CSI office. Thank you!**

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*Don't forget the CSI Gift Shop for all your gift needs*

Weddings - Housewarming Gifts  
Birthdays - Anniversaries - B'nai Mitzvahs

*Free gift wrapping and local delivery.*

Call Terri or Deborah to help you with your shopping needs



## **Shemini Atzeret**

*This commentary was written by Rabbi Eliezer Diamond, Associate Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics, JTS*

For me as a child Sh'mini Atzeret was without question the least memorable among the Jewish holidays of the fall season. Sandwiched between the high drama of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and the pageantry of Sukkot on one hand and the revelry of Simchat Torah on the other, Sh'mini Atzeret often seemed more like a way station than a destination. It had only two distinguishing characteristics. The first, the prayer for rain, seemed to me supremely irrelevant and even perverse; I wasn't a farmer and I liked spending time

outdoors, so what was the upside to rain? The second, Yizkor, was depressing; in any case in the synagogue of my youth those lucky enough to have parents who were alive and well repaired to the lobby to schmooze while the sad and serious business of Yizkor took place behind closed doors.

What changed my attitude was a midrashic comment cited by Rashi in his Torah commentary. Commenting on the designation of this holiday as "atzeret" the rabbis understood it in the sense of stopping or delaying. "'I have stopped (atzarti) you, from leaving,' [says God]. [It can be likened to] a king invited his children to a banquet lasting many days. At the banquet's conclusion when it came time for the children to leave he said, 'My children! I beg of you, delay your departure by one more day. It is difficult for me to take leave of you.'"

There is a breathtaking beauty and profundity in this midrash. We spend all of the High Holidays and Sukkot reaching out to God, asking for forgiveness, for redemption, for life itself. But is God listening? Yes, say the rabbis, and Sh'mini Atzeret is a concrete expression of God's response. I know that you are near me now, says God, and I wish that it could always be so. Do not think that when you feel far from me that only you feel alone; so do I. Let us be as close to each other now and for as long and as often as is possible.

For me this Midrash suggests that the relative calm and simplicity of Sh'mini Atzeret is a necessary complement — perhaps, even, a corrective — to the solemnity and celebration of the surrounding holidays. God is not to be found only in the peak moments of petition and celebration. These can serve only as catalysts for intimacy with the divine in daily life, not as substitutes for that closeness. Sh'mini Atzeret reminds me that God seeks my presence as I seek God's and that the opportunity for that encounter exists every day of the year, with or without a shofar, sukkah, or seder.

These thoughts lead me to one further reflection, a troubling one. By the time Simchat Torah rolls around many of us, myself included, profess to be sick of the holidays, eagerly looking forward to life returning to normal. Enough synagogue, enough praying, enough singing, enough eating; daily life may be difficult, but this is exhausting. Resentment, sometimes expressed as cynicism, often descends over the congregation as we celebrate Simchat Torah; perhaps the parodies of prayer that are often performed are a means of channeling some of that frustration.

When I hear others, or myself, expressing this sentiment I feel a profound sadness. Beginning with the advent of the month of Elul and ending with Sh'mini Atzeret we recite daily Psalm 27 in which we say the following: "One thing I ask of Adonai, this alone I request; to live in Adonai's house all the days of my life, to gaze upon Adonai's beauty and to frequent his sanctuary." More than anything else, the power of my belief in God is the consequent sense of connection — to God and to God's creations. Feelings of loneliness, isolation, and alienation disappear in the aura of God's presence. Just as important, I am able to turn to my fellow human beings not in fear and suspicion but in love and fellowship. Should I not then crave every moment of closeness that the holidays provide? Why is it that once I am afforded the opportunity that I requested, frequenting God's sanctuary, it becomes a burden rather than a gift?

For an answer I turn to Isaiah 58, the Haftarah that is read on the morning of Yom Kippur. Isaiah records the complaints of those who have observed the fast day in all of its detail and yet feel that God has not heeded them. Isaiah's reply to them is both acerbic and majestic:

Is such the fast I desire, a day for men to starve their bodies?  
Is it bowing the head like a bulrush and lying in sackcloth and ashes?  
Do you call that a fast, a day when Adonai is favorable? No, this is the fast I desire: To unlock the fetters of wickedness and untie the cords of the yoke to let the oppressed go free; to break off every yoke.  
It is to share your bread with the hungry, and to take the wretched poor into your home; when you see the naked clothe him, and not to ignore your own kin.  
Then shall your light burst through like the dawn and your healing spring up quickly; your vindicator shall march before you, the presence of Adonai shall be your rear guard.  
Then when you call Adonai will answer when you cry he will say: Here I am.

What is it, I ask myself, that those addressed by Isaiah do not understand? My answer is that their relationship to the ritual of worship is purely external and superficial. They believe that the performance of the required rites can win them God's favor. They fail to see that the discipline of religious rites and observances is for their sake, not for God's. It is a discipline meant to remind them of a power greater than themselves, a power that is the source of their own ability to think and act. Ritual is meant to be a conduit to humility, which is simply the ability to see clearly one's place in God's world. That vision should lead us to see our fellow human beings as partners in doing God's work and the rituals of religion as opportunities to practice mastering our appetites and channeling them constructively as well as occasions for acknowledging the blessings that God has given us.

At times I am one of those complainers whom Isaiah reproved. I see the intense period of the fall holidays as a necessary evil that I need to shoulder to satisfy the whims of a demanding God. I forget that these days are windows of opportunity that allow me to spend time in God's presence and to evaluate the rest of my life from that perspective. Most important, I forget that these holidays are a product of God's love for us, God's desire to be near us.

The time of dwelling in God's house is drawing to a close. We can use the little time that remains to reflect on the blessing of being in God's presence or we can strain at the bit, looking longingly toward this coming Monday and the return to routine that it promises. Let us hear God's voice as embodied in Sh'mini Atzeret, the voice that asks us to tarry a day, an hour, a moment longer. Let us turn to God as God, on this humble holiday, turns to us.

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## **Simchat Torah**

*This commentary was written by Rabbi Matthew Berkowitz, Senior Rabbinic Fellow, JTS*

This weekend marks the solemn conclusion of Deuteronomy and the joyous beginning of Genesis as we celebrate the holiday of Simchat Torah. Far from simply being about children, Hershey bars, and caramel apples, it is a time to reflect on committing and recommitting ourselves to words of Torah. Professor Ed Greenstein of Tel Aviv University laments the

pediatric focus of this holiday. He writes, "Simchat Torah should develop into a stimulus to mature Jews to reconsider the study of Torah, or at least to take Torah seriously. What are all those lawyers, teachers, doctors, accountants and the rest of them dancing with Torah for anyway? [Learning Torah] enables us to see the many levels of serious themes in which the Bible deals. More than ever are we capable of penetrating to deeper reaches of the biblical psyche" (Strassfeld, *The Jewish Holidays*, 155). This journey to which Greenstein alludes however begins with a commitment to learn and the desire to question. Through inner and outer engagement, Torah refreshes itself anew and we, as students, reap its fruits daily. In this spirit, a particularly beautiful teaching is offered by Rabbi Levi Ben Gershom (also known by the acronym of his initials, *Ralbag*; a prolific bible commentator who lived in fourteenth-century France) at the conclusion of the book of Deuteronomy.

Addressing himself to the latter part of the verse, "Moses was buried in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beit Peor *and no one knows the burial place to this very day*" (Deuteronomy 34:6), *Ralbag* queries as to the secretive nature of Moses' burial. What is the import of such a rite? Why must the burial be hidden from the eyes of Moses' own flock? In a deeply sensitive interpretation, he offers three reasons for this cryptic rite. First, *Ralbag* explains that God was concerned that people would turn Moses' resting place into a devotional site and in turn, transform Moses into a deity. The prooftext for this reason may be found in the expression "opposite *Beit Peor*" — for we know the Israelites engaged in idolatry in *Peor* and so the burial site is more than strategic, it is ripe with meaning. Second, our commentator points out that burial involves a degree of humiliation. God sought to protect Moses from humiliation. And so *Ralbag* roots this explanation in the phrase "*va'gai*," "in the valley." Linguistically, he connects the Hebrew *gai* to *ge'ut* "pride" so as to say that God buried him with pride. Third, *Ralbag* hints at an important aspect of leadership. He explains that just as Moses was separated from others in life, so too was he separate in death. Thus, Rabbi Levi Ben Gershom offers a unique window into the divine sensitivity and love for one of God's treasured servants.

Still, of all the reasons cited by *Ralbag*, I, as a teacher and student of Torah, am most deeply moved by his lesson in leadership. To learn Torah is to be a revolutionary in today's hurried world. Just as God separates Moses, and that distinction brings with it not only the gift of leadership but also its concomitant share of loneliness, so too the learning of Torah. While immersing one's self in the study of Torah enriches one's life, it also makes one keenly aware of the yawning divide between the world in which we live and the ideal expressed by Torah. May this coming Simchat Torah be an opportunity for all of us to become leaders in learning.

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**For other commentaries on this week's Torah portion check out these sites:**

[Aish.com](http://Aish.com)

[ISJL Taste of Torah](http://ISJL Taste of Torah)

[JTS](http://JTS)

[MyJewishLearning.com](http://MyJewishLearning.com)

[USCJ Torah Sparks](http://USCJ Torah Sparks)

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Quick links:

- [CSI Macon Online](#)
- [United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism \(USCJ\)](#)
- [JTS Podcast - this week's Parsha](#)
- [Audio Siddur](#)
- [Jewish Telegraphic Agency \(JTA\)](#)
- [Israeli News Broadcast – in English](#)
- [The Jewish Ethicist](#)
- [Synagogue 3000](#)
- [Learn through USCJ online](#)
- [The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum](#)
- [United Jewish Communities \(UJC\)](#)
- [American Jewish University](#)

For the children (or the young at heart):

- [Torah Portion Coloring Pages](#)
- [Babaganews Torah Parasha of the week movie](#)

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