

Sh'mini Atzeret
Stay with me a bit longer

Study Session

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KOACH
on campus



The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Contents

- 1) Text Sheet Handout
- 2) Background Materials
- 3) Facilitator Guide
- 4) Additional Resources

The following materials have been created by **KOACH** for the enhancement of your on-campus programming. They are designed to be adjustable based on the desires of the students and the available time. Each packet contains: a text sheet that is ready to be photo copied, background materials and a facilitator guide. The background materials and facilitator guide are designed to help you create conversations around the materials and to create connections between the materials and today's life. If we can be of additional help please contact us at estrin@uscj.org.

Sh'mini Atzeret

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Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:36

שְׁבַעַת יָמִים תִּקְרְיֻבוּ אֶשֶׁה לַיהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי
מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אֶשֶׁה לַיהוָה עֶצְרַת הוּא
כָּל־מְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ:

... on the eighth day, it shall be a holy gathering for you, and you shall bring a fire offering to God; it is a **day of assembly/detention (atzeret he)**, and you may not do any work.

Bamidbar (Numbers) 29:35-36

בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי עֶצְרַת תִּהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל־מְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ:
וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם עֲלֶיהָ אֶשְׁהֲרִיחַ נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה פֶּר אֶחָד אֵיל אֶחָד
כְּבָשִׂים בְּנֵי־שָׁנָה שְׁבַעַת תְּמִימִם:

On the eight day you shall have an **assembly/remain (atzeret he)**: you shall do no work. You shall offer a burnt offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour to the Lord, a single bull, a single ram...

Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 55b

אמר רבי אליעזר: הני שבעים פרים כנגד מי? - כנגד שבעים אומות.
פר יחידי למה? - כנגד אומה יחידה.
משל למלך בשר ודם שאמר לעבדיו: עשו לי סעודה גדולה.
ליום אחרון אמר לאוהבו: עשה לי סעודה קטנה, כדי שאהנה ממך

The single bull why [is it brought]? [It] corresponds to the singular nation [of Israel]. This can be compared to a king of flesh and blood who said to his servants: "prepare for me a great banquet." [When it came] to the final day he said to his beloved [companion]: "prepare for me a small meal so I may enjoy your [company]. (Rashi: I derive pleasure from your company alone.)

Rashi on Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:36

עצרת הוא - עצרתי אתכם אצלי כמלך שזימן את בניו לסעודה
לכך וכך ימים, כיון שהגיע זמן להפטר אמר בני בבקשה מכם,
עכבו עמי עוד יום אחד, קשה עלי פרידתכם:

Remain with me. Like a king who invites his children to a banquet of several days and when it comes time to go, he said to them; my children, "please stay with me one more day, your leaving is hard for me."

Background Materials

Sh'mini Atzeret

Sh'mini Atzeret is the only festival mentioned in the Torah without a reason for its observance. Originally, this was a one day festival immediately following the seven days of Sukkot. Today, outside of Israel, Sh'mini Atzeret is observed for two days (the second being called Simhat Torah) each with their own characteristics.

One major part of Sukkot is the necessity for the Jewish people to gather together as Jews under the sukkah. Each day we invite different ushpizin (guests) to join us. In Temple times, during Sukkot, 70 bulls were sacrificed over the course of the seven days, each representing one of the 70 nations of the world. On Sh'mini Atzeret, a single bull was brought representing Israel. Sh'mini Atzeret is a festival dedicated to *Ahdut* (the unity) of the Jewish people. Today, on this day, we begin the process of leaving the sukkah and returning to our homes, we move from the universal themes of Sukkot to the intimacy between a people and their Maker. One theme is to be concerned with the children of Israel and the Messianic rejoicing over peace among the nations and the enjoyment of undisturbed communion with God takes priority over all else.

This year Sh'mini Atzeret begins the evening of October 6 through October 7, 2004.

The Halakha (Jewish Law) of Sh'mini Atzeret

As a festival in its own right Sh'mini Atzeret omits most of the observances of Sukkot. Although one no longer dwells in the sukkah, Kiddush (and the Shehehyanu blessing) should be recited there without the brakha (blessing) of "*leshev b'sukkah*" (to sit in the sukkah).

Several adjustments are made in the davening (prayer service) with perhaps the most significant being the recital of the Prayer for Rain "*mashiv haruah u'morid hageshem*" (Who makes the wind blow and the rains fall) during the Musaf Amidah¹. Tradition teaches that the people Israel are being judged for rain during Sukkot and now that the need to dwell in the sukkah has passed, Sh'mini Atzeret, the beginning of the rainy season in Israel, is proper time to begin to praise the make of rain. Yizkor (memorial prayer) is also recited.

¹ The prayer for rain was composed by Rabbi Eleazar Ha-Kallir, also the author of the Hoshanot recited throughout Sukkot, during the end of the sixth century in Israel.

Facilitator Guide

This guide is designed to provide a plethora of information so that you can determine the route that you would like your discussions to take. Although it is designed as a progression, it is not necessary to proceed from beginning to end. Each section can stand on its own or be combined with another. “Section Three - Questions to Consider” are brainstorming points for other conversations. We have included some, but not all, possible answers as discussion points. Use the packet in its entirety or choose parts based on the time you have available and the students in your group. The guide is not meant to be complete but rather a taste of some of the information available on the topic.

GOALS:

- A deeper understanding of Sh'mini Atzeret and its relevance today.
- A discussion about Jewish unity and our relationship to God.

Vocabulary

Sh'mini – eighth

Atzeret – to retain, to hold back, to tarry (Rashi²) from the root atzar – to stop. Used in an affectionate way;

-- assembly (Onkelos³ in his *Targum* (translation))

² Perhaps the best known and most basic of all commentators, Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki (son of Yitzchak) lived in Troyes, France from 1040 until 1105

³ Second century translator of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic, his work later being given the title Targum Onkelos. A proselyte, he gained the respect of the leading Hebrew scholars of his day.

Section One - Biblical Background: (front page of text sheet)

This section is designed to give the biblical background of the holiday of Sh'mini Atzeret and to set the stage for the two midrashim that follow. It can easily be summarized by the facilitator if time does not permit a full discussion. You can look at the pasukim (verses) in their biblical context of verbally explain their context.

Sukkot is granted the extension of an extra day based on Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:36 and Bamidbar (Numbers) 29:35. The verse in Vayikra is in the midst of a listing of various holidays that we are to observe once we have entered the land of Israel. In Bamidbar, the verse follows a detailed list of the sacrifices to be offered each of the days of Sukkot.

Questions to Consider

- What is this holy day?
- Why is it a day of 'detention'? & what does that mean?
- Why might God have granted this additional day to Sukkot but not Pesah or Shavuot?
 - On these three holidays the Israelites would come to the Temple. From Pesah to Shavuot is seven weeks, Shavuot to Sukkot - four months, Sukkot to Pesah - six or seven months of winter. Perhaps God was anticipating the long span of time before the people would return and wanted just a little more time with them before they left.

Section two Midrashic Concepts ~ (back page of text sheet)

If you are only able to focus on one of the two midrashim that follow, I suggest that you use Rashi's version as it lends itself to some fantastic conversations.

Babylonian Talmud Succah 55b

This section is found in the midst of a discussion regarding the significance of the 70 bulls being offered for sacrifice during Sukkot. The text takes a short detour to ask why on Sh'mini Atzeret only a single bull is brought. The Talmud had previously stated that the 70 bulls of Sukkot referred to the 70 nations. In this section, the text states that the one bull of Sh'mini Atzeret refers to Israel and continues with the *masha* (parable) about the king.

Questions about the text to consider.

- Who does the king represent? The servant? The beloved?
 - God, the nations of the world, B'nai Yisrael (children of Israel)
- Why does the king first ask his servant to prepare a great banquet and only afterwards ask his beloved to prepare a small banquet?
- Why not just go straight to the small banquet with his beloved?
- What do you make of Rashi's comment?
- What is the point of this *masha*?
 - During Sukkot, the entire world has a part to play while on Sh'mini Atzeret Israel alone is to spend time with God.

Discussion questions.

- What do you think about this concept of taking care of everyone and then having extra for the favorites? Is it good? Is it selfish?
- What might the goals be? Are there other ways to accomplish the same goals?

Rashi on Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:36

Very similar in idea to the section from Talmud but with some differences that can be fleshed out into some great conversations about our relationship with God, God's presence in our lives, etc.. Have them do a comparison between the two & discuss the differences & the different outtakes from them.

Questions about the text to consider.

- How is this version different/similar to the one found in Talmud?
 - The Talmud version preceded Rashi.
 - Who is the king, children, beloved? Does it make a difference if we are referred to as servants or children?
 - What is Rashi trying to convey that does not exist in the Talmud version?
- Is there anything about the way the story is relayed that catches your eyes?
 - YOUR parting is hard for ME. What do you make of it?

Questions to consider.

Assuming that the King is a stand in for God...

- YOUR parting is difficult for ME.
 - Who is leaving? How do we normally phase this? "Parting is such sweet sorrow," "when we part". Typically it is a dual action but not here. Only we are leaving.
 - What does that mean?
 - Does God ever leave us?
 - When might we draw closer to God? Social action, prayer, tzedakah...
- The parting is difficult for God. Why? Is it more difficult for God or is God being self serving? What do you think of this?
- Who else is parting?
 - We are parting from each other. How? When we are united we have a common identity as God's children. When we are not we identify ourselves with other labels. What might they be?
 - Consider – that on Sh'mini Atzeret we can think about "What is a Jew?" rather than the oft repeated question "Who is a Jew?"

- Does the addition of one more day make the parting easier?
 - Does the additional day increase our connection to God?
 - How do we relate the question to our own lives?
 - Do you like short goodbyes or long goodbyes? Why?
- Is there a difference in being together with everyone and only the “favorites” being there?
 - Is there a difference being there with everyone first & only then being singled out verses being singled out initially?

Section three ~ Other possible discussion points

- Sukkot, in fact every other Hag (holiday) has specific mitzvot attached to it. Only Sh'mini Atzeret has none. What can we learn from this?
 - Our attention is to be turned to spending time together as Klal Yisrael (Jewish community) and with God.
- On Sukkot we are commanded to reside in the sukkah. It is the ultimate equalizer. Everyone, rich-poor, learned-simple, alike live in these shaky, bough-covered huts for seven days. On Sh'mini Atzeret we remain in the sukkah but it is no longer a mitzvah. We remain together as one without the outward expression. Why?
 - Provides a time of transition from the oneness to the individualness of the remainder of the year.
 - Allows us to concentrate on establishing that oneness for our own sakes rather than for the sake of God.
 - Discuss in relation to Klal Yisrael and the various "groups" of Jews today.
- By the time Sh'mini Atzeret and Simhat Torah arrive we are tired from so many holidays. Rosh HaShannah and Yom Kippur challenge us emotionally and Sukkot physically. We may by this point feel relieved that the holidays are done. Sh'mini Atzeret shows us that we should feel the opposite, that we should not be so eager to leave. Is this realistic? How can we help to make this happen?
- What can we, the beloved, do on Sh'mini Atzeret to emphasis/strengthen this relationship with God?

Additional Resources

- A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice by Isaac Klein. The Jewish Theological Seminary of America. 1992.
- Sefer haToda-ah by Nachman Bulman. 1962. Translated into English as The Book of Our Heritage by Eliyahu Kitov. Feldheim Publishers. 1968.
- Simchas Torah by Rabbi Moshe Lieber. Mesorah Publications, ltd. 1996.
- <http://www.ou.org/chagim/shmini-simchat/default.htm>
- <http://www.jafi.org.il/education/festivals/tish/37.html>
- <http://www.chaburas.org/shmini/html>

Additional Text Resources

- Babylonian Talmud Sukkot 47a, 55b
- Bamidbar Rabbah 21:24
- Midrash Tehillim 109
- Yalkut Shimoni, Parashat Pinchas 782
- Zohar I 64a-b
- Zohar II 87a
- Zohar III 32a