



Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah

October 10, 2020

Today is *Shemini Atzeret*, a festival shrouded in some mystery. It occurs on the day after the 7th day of the festival of *Sukkot*, and is literally the 8th day. But, it is a separate holy day even though it is connected to and a part of the spiritual aspects of the festival of *Sukkot*. It is a separate festival in its own right. Since it is a separate day after the end of *Sukkot*, the *lulav*, the *etrog*, and the *sukkah* are traditionally not used on *Shemini Atzeret*. In tradition, the *sukkah* remains until after *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah* end before it is taken down, and even though still present, it is traditionally not used on this day. However, we will use our little *sukkah* today as many congregations now do on *Shemini Atzeret*.

The Hebrew word *atzeret* is usually translated as "assembly" with *Shemini Atzeret* meaning "The Eighth Day of Assembly, but the root of *atzeret* is the word *atzor*, meaning to "stop" or "tarry". Looking at it in this way, it is a day when ADONAI calls us to tarry and spend an additional day with Him at the end of *Sukkot*. If we understand that *Sukkot* is a special time of joy which we spend with ADONAI after the harvest, this helps us to understand the spiritual implications of *Shemini Atzeret* and that our Father and our Messiah are asking us to remain with them for an extra day of joy. We have spent the past seven days with them during *Sukkot*, but ADONAI desires that we extend our time and just have an extra day to love them and rest in their love.

As we discussed during the month of Elul, we sometimes connect the story of Song of Solomon, *Shir HaShirim*, Song of Songs, with Yeshua and His bride, the Messianic Body. Understanding it this way, the song being sung by the bride is represented by each of us, a part of His collective body who have earnestly turned our hearts to Yeshua. It is a picture of love beyond love. We say we love Him, but He asks us for more love. The amount of our present love is not enough for our bridegroom, our Messiah. *Shemini Atzeret* is a picture of our remaining with our groom, Yeshua, a little longer and being in His presence a little more as He asks us for more love. Song of Songs 6:1 says: 1 "Where has your lover gone, most beautiful among women? Where has your lover turned, so we may seek him with you" (Song of Songs 6:1 TLV)? We, Messiah's bride, are being referred to as "most beautiful among women." Could it be that this is a reference to us in the way in which we will soon appear as a body, a body without spot or blemish? And, then we, the woman, the bride of Messiah, respond in verses 2 and 3: 2 "My lover went down to his garden, to the beds of balsam to graze his flocks in the gardens and to gather lilies. 3 I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. He browses among the lilies" (Song of Songs 6:2-3 TLV). As individuals within the body of Messiah, His bride, each of us is expressing our love for Him, reciprocating His matchless love for us. This is what we are called to do!

As humans, we can completely understand the romantic love which the young woman in this song has expressed. Yeshua wishes for it to be our expression to Him: *I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine*. This sentence is translated from the Hebrew *Ani l'dodi v'dodi li*. This is what Yeshua desires our relationship with Him to be; a two way relationship equally. He wants us to love Him just as much as He loves us. It's a very deep and devoted love, a love which should cause us not to want to be away from Him even for a minute. But

our love is not to be just an emotional relationship. True love also takes the form of servanthood. A committed follower of Yeshua would give their own life to follow after Him and to serve Him. We praise G-d that not many of us in this land have had to do that, but millions of Yeshua's followers in other lands have died for Him. And, that should be our commitment to Him as well. At this time in our nation, we don't know what the future holds for us. Persecution may arise. But, as committed followers of Yeshua, we must be prepared to continue to walk in our calling, realizing that it is the "higher calling" to which we owe our allegiance. As *Sha'ul* said: 14 *"I press on toward the goal for the reward of the upward calling of God in Messiah Yeshua* (Philippians 3:14 TLV).

What has just been described is the deep spiritual love relationship which Yeshua asks each of us, His followers, to have. But that deep commitment of love must also translate into physical action. And Yeshua has given us plenty of examples in the Gospels of how we are to be His servants. But, deep inside our human personality, our soul, the remains of our old carnal self is still present. When we accepted Yeshua, our spirits, our hearts, were circumcised and became united with His Spirit. But sometimes the remains of "the old man" deep in our souls still wants to have his way and rises up and tempts us to do what we in our circumcised hearts do not want to do. And we will have to deal with this as long as we remain in this mortal body.

But, there is a way in which we can minimize our spiritual weaknesses. We can minimize them by consciously and deliberately taking up our stake daily and following after Yeshua. Yeshua said: *"If anyone wants to follow Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross every day, and follow Me"* (Luke 9:23 TLV). To deny ourselves means that we deal with our "old man" daily and do what Yeshua asks of us. This is something which we must do willingly and not grudgingly. If we feel that we are being forced or in any way resent it, we are not being good disciples of Yeshua. Taking up our stake daily is a free-will decision which we should have been taught about and made to understand at the time that we accepted Yeshua. If you did not understand it at that time, today is the day that you can understand and make that decision. We are either a disciple of Yeshua according to His definition or we are not His *talmidim*, His disciples. Accepting this relationship is something which we must do willingly, even joyfully. If you have never understood being Yeshua's follower in this way, you can make that decision right now, in your own heart. Pray about it and don't let this day go by before you respond to Yeshua. He is calling to each of us today and asking us the question He asked Simon Peter: *"Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?"* (John 21:15 TLV).

What does it mean to take up our cross daily? I don't believe that it refers to the burdens of life which some of us experience, things like cancer, bankruptcy, rebellious children, failed marriages or any such problem. We all have some of these things. Yeshua said: 33 *"In the world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33b TLV)! The Complete Jewish Bible uses the Yiddish word for "troubles," *tsuris*. Yes, in this world, we all have *tsuris*! And, Yeshua helps us to deal with them. But, rather than referring to these troubles which are common to all humans, when Yeshua said that we "must take up our cross," He is explaining the type of relationship which He requires of us. When He picked up the cross bar of His stake, His cross, and carried it, He was carrying it to His death. It was His full and complete commitment to us. When He tells us that we are to take up our execution stake daily, He is explaining that as His disciples, our relationship with Him is also a total commitment to Him. He said that His disciples: "must deny

themselves.” To deny ourselves, we must die to self and make Him number “One” in our lives; really number “One.”

What the year 5781 holds for the United States and also for the Nation of Israel is in the natural a story waiting to be written, but an outcome which ADONAI knows very well. We must begin our walk in this new year without that knowledge, but in faith that ADONAI's promises are true. We move forward in faith regarding what is going to happen this coming year because our lives as followers of Yeshua are not only tied to this nation in which we live, but also to what ADONAI is doing in Israel. At the present time He is preparing the land and its inhabitants for the return of His Son to Jerusalem as King Messiah. Don't be fooled by stories of an antichrist, a rebuilt temple or a great tribulation. That will not happen before Yeshua returns. We are living in the “Last Days” now. We must live as if Yeshua could come any day. He has called us to be prepared every day: 38 *“For in those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark. 39 And they did not understand until the flood came and swept them all away. So shall it be at the coming of the Son of Man”* (Matthew 24:38-39 TLV).

When it is ADONAI's time, Yeshua will meet us in the clouds along with the righteous dead and we will be with Him forever. The multitude which will meet Yeshua in the air will include not only Messianic Jews and believing Gentiles, but “all Israel.” *Sha'ul* said: 16 *“If the firstfruit is holy, so is the whole batch of dough; and if the root is holy, so are the branches”* (Romans 11:16 TLV). The Jews who have not yet trusted Yeshua are the remainder of the *challah* loaf, who at that time will have joined their firstfruits brother and sister Jews. Right now Messianic Jews represent only one small lump from the full loaf of *challah*. And, just as the majority of the whole loaf of *challah* has remained unrisen and unbaked for two thousand years, the majority of the native branches of the olive tree of Israel have also remained not regrafted into their own tree. But, a day is coming when the remainder of Abraham's children will mourn for their Messiah as one mourns for an only son as it says in Zechariah 12:10, and they will place their trust in Him. And, then they will be a part of the multitude of Yeshua's followers who rise to meet Him in the air as we are told in 1Corinthians 15 and 1Thessalonians 4. We don't set any dates, but the time is on our spiritual horizon.

As Israel was preparing to cross the Jordan into the Land of Canaan, Joshua said: 5..... *“Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow Adonai will do wonders in your midst”* (Joshua 3:5 TLV). We don't know exactly when “tomorrow” is for us, but we do know that now is the time that we must consecrate ourselves to follow Yeshua unwaveringly, that we might be fully prepared when ADONAI gives the order. May this eighth day on which we have remained with ADONAI be a time which each of us will remember as a day on which we made an important decision. Today is the day: will we “consecrate or reconsecrate ourselves” to take up our stake daily? Will we consecrate ourselves to Yeshua as Israel consecrated themselves when preparing to cross the Jordan River and receive the promise? Today is an important day in each of our lives. I am not asking you for a decision now, but that you would pray sincerely about it today. *Chag Sameach!*