

# Parsha Ponders

Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah | October 9, 2020 | 21 Tishrei 5781

## *The prerequisite of unity<sup>1</sup>*

בני, בבקשה מכם עכבו עמי עוד יום אחד. קשה עלי פרדתכם

My children, I implore of you to stay with Me one more day. It is difficult for me *preidaschem*<sup>2</sup>

Shemini Atzeres is an interesting festival. It follows the climax of the Days of Awe and Sukkos. Rosh Hashana we prayed and blew the shofar. Yom Kippur we fasted. Sukkos we lived in the *sukkah* and shook our four species. What's the point of this final holiday? It doesn't have any paraphernalia. It doesn't seem to commemorate anything. What message we to take with us from this festival?

*Chazal* teach us<sup>2</sup> what this holiday is all about. During the festival of *sukkos*, we brought seventy bull offerings. These offerings represent the "Seventy Nations", who in turn represent all of mankind. It's analogous to a great King, who invites all the nations of the world to his palace. He throws them a huge party, and everyone feasts and rejoices. After seven days of partying, the time has come to return home. All the representatives of the nations pack up their belongings and start to head back. The King tells the Jewish people: "Don't leave just yet. Stay with me one more day. קשה עלי פרדתכם, it's difficult for Me for us to part". Hashem set up the festival of Shemini Atzeres as an act of affection between Him and His people.

While this is a well-known parable, the Rizhnytzer Chossid provides a more homiletical reading of it. The month of Tishrei is a very busy month. It's full of so many *mitzvos*. There's the shofar, the *sukkos*, the four species. All the prayers. There's so many merits that are accrued during this month. However, Hashem tells us before we part: There's one thing that we need to work on. קשה עלי פרדתכם, it's difficult for Hashem our פירוד, our division. We don't get along as much as we should. We have different factions, different groups. Sure, we stand together from time to time, but only because we have to. We don't do it because we want to. Hashem pleads with us to work on our unity, and to love each other like siblings.

Shemini Atzeres is also the time of Simchas Torah. We celebrate the gift of the Torah that has been given to us, and look forward to another year of study. The Maharal asks<sup>3</sup> an interesting question. The Jews received the Torah at Mount Sinai, fifty days after leaving Egypt. Why didn't they receive it earlier? We are taught<sup>4</sup> that at the splitting of the sea, the Jews attained the highest levels of prophecy. The lowest of Jews saw more than the greatest of prophets ever did. Why didn't Hashem give them the Torah, right then and there?

The answer is found in a verse right before they actually did receive the Torah. It says ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר, the Jewish people camped next to the mountain<sup>5</sup>. What's interesting is the verse says they camped in the singular. Literally: he camped. We are taught<sup>6</sup> that the Jewish people were like one person, with one heart. They had achieved a level of unity like no other. Then they received the Torah.

The Maharal says that we see from here that they couldn't have received the Torah at the splitting of the sea. A prerequisite for the Jews receiving the Torah is unity. They only achieved that at Mount Sinai. Despite their amazing level of prophecy at the sea, they weren't yet worthy to receive it.

This lesson can apply to Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah as well. We're celebrating receiving and learning the Torah. We dance with Torah scrolls and make a great feast. Nevertheless, something we have to keep in mind is קשה עלי פרדתכם. It is difficult for Hashem our division. In fact, the Maharal is telling us that without unity, we don't even deserve to receive the Torah! Shemini Atzeres teaches us the lesson of unity. Once we have that, we'll be worthy to receive, and then celebrate receiving, the Torah.

Good Shabbos and Chag Sameach!

<sup>1</sup> Based on a *vort* heard from [Rav Asher Weiss](#), Hoshana Rabbah 5781

<sup>2</sup> [Rashi](#) to [Leviticus](#) 23:26, based on [Sukkah](#) 55b (which simply says מאמך כדי שאהנה ממך)

<sup>3</sup> I couldn't find where

<sup>4</sup> [Rashi](#) to [Exodus](#) 15:2, quoting [Mechilta ad. loc.](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Exodus](#) 19:2

<sup>6</sup> [Rashi ad. loc.](#), quoting [Mechilta ad. loc.](#)