

The Florence Melton Adult Mini-School  
Section: Rhythms of Jewish Living  
<http://mcohen02.tripod.com/rhythms.html>  
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## Topic: *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah*

**Key Idea.** Like *Sukkot*, *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah* are referred in the *kiddush* and the liturgical inserts as "z'man simchateinu"—the season of our joy.

*Shemini Atzeret* is mentioned in only two of the four passages in the Torah which list the festivals. "A solemn festival day" immediately following the seven days of *Sukkot*, it is observed by *kiddush*, candlelighting and abstention from work. The *lulav* and *etrog* are not used, and the blessing "*leishev basukka*" is not recited. During the *musaf* service on *Shemini Atzeret* the prayer for rain is recited, and the phrase "*Mashiv haruach umoreed hagashem*" ("You make the wind blow and the rain fall") is added to all recitations of the *Amidah* from *Shemini Atzeret* until *Pesach*. *Yizkor*, the prayer of remembrance for the dead, is recited by Ashkenazim (Jews following European liturgical tradition) on *Shemini Atzeret*. The period of time beginning with the first day of *Pesach* on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan up to and including *Shemini Atzeret*, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Tishrei, is exactly 185 days long. It's interesting to note that the period of time from the traditional first day of the vernal equinox (normally March 21<sup>st</sup>) up to and including the traditional day of the autumnal equinox (usually Sept. 21<sup>st</sup>), is also exactly 185 days long.

*Simchat Torah*, the second day of *Shemini Atzeret* in the Diaspora but observed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Tishrei in Israel, was unknown in Talmudic times. It apparently originated as a festival on its own during the 9<sup>th</sup> century in Babylonia, where the annual Torah reading cycle was practiced. On *Simchat Torah* the annual Torah reading cycle is concluded with the reading of the end of the book of Deuteronomy by the *Chatan Torah* ("torah bridegroom") and begins again with the reading of the opening verses of Genesis by the *chatan bereisheet* ("Genesis bridegroom"). The custom of carrying the torah scrolls in a procession around the synagogue seven times is called *Hakkafot* ("circuits"), and originated in the Middle Ages. There is joyous dancing with the Torah. In many traditional synagogues, all post-bar mitzvah males are all called for an *aliyah* on *Simchat Torah*.

### *Our discussion of the texts:*

**Text 1. Leviticus 23: 33-36. The biblical commandment to observe *Shemini Atzeret*.**

**Text 2. Numbers 29:35-38. The *Shemini Atzeret* sacrificial offerings.**

**Text 3. Rashi on Numbers 29:35 – What “stops” on *Shemini Atzeret*?**

**Text 4. Rashi on Leviticus 23:36 – Why a “solemn” gathering?**

**Text 5. *Sefer HaChinukh*- Why are the *lulav* and *etrog* are not used on *Shemini Atzeret*?**

**Text 6. *Pesikta Rabbati* 1:4. Differences between Jewish and non-Jewish holiday observances**

**Texts 7–8. *Mishna Rosh Hashana* 1:2 and *Ta’anit* 1:2. *Sukkot*, *Shemini Atzeret* and rain.**

**Text 9. Mordechai Margaliot. Different customary Torah reading cycles among Jewish communities in the Middle Ages.**

**Text 10. Michael Strassfeld. Comparing the relationship of *Shemini Atzeret* to *Sukkot* to that of *Shavuot* is to *Pesach*.**

**Text 11. Alexander A. Steinbach--*Simchat Torah* and the unbroken cycle of Torah.**