



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR

Program Director, OU Israel Center

SHMINI ATZERET/SIMCHAT TORAH

Upon the conclusion of the *festival of Sukkot*, we celebrate the *yom tov* of *Shemini Atzeret*. The *yom tov* of *Shemini Atzeret* is of course known by another familiar name - *Simchat Torah*. On *Shemini Atzeret* we move from the *simcha* of sitting in the *Sukkah* and rejoicing with the *arba minim* to the joy of dancing together with the *sifrei Torah*. The *Chasidic* Masters suggest numerous messages which are represented by the *hakafot* and dancing of *Simchat Torah*.

The *Baal HaTanya zy'a*, noted that a *sefer Torah* contains 600,000 letters representing the 600,000 souls who stood together to receive the *Torah* at Sinai. The *Sefer Torah* represents the unity of *Klal Yisrael*, and the value and importance of every single member of the Jewish People- if one letter in a *sefer Torah* becomes erased or damaged, then the entire *sefer Torah* is considered *pasul*. On *Simchat Torah*, we all come together to dance with the *sifrei Torah* to remind us of the value of unity and sanctity of each and every Jew.

Reb Yisrael Friedman, the *Rizhiner Rebbe zy'a*, points to a well known *Maamar Chazal* to explain this *yom tov* of *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah*. The *gemara* in *Masechet Shabbat 31a* records the familiar story of the prospective convert who comes before the sage *Hillel* and asks him to teach him the entire *Torah*, *al regel achat*-while standing on one foot.

Hillel of course famously replied “that which is hateful to you, do not do unto others...”

The Rebbe explained that what the prospective convert was really asking was - tell me all

the *Torah* there is to know about the *yom tov* of *Shemini Atzeret* - *al regel achat* - about the *yom tov which is one day long* - the holiday that seemingly has no particular mitzvah associated with it. The Rebbe explained that we therefore sing and dance and celebrate together, to remind us on this *yom tov* of *Simchat Torah*-this *regel achat* - of *Hillel's* eternal message of unity and mutual respect.

Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira h'yd, the Rebbe of *Piasczna zy'a*, offers another beautiful explanation as to why we call this *yom tov* of *Shemini Atzeret* by the additional name of *Simchat Torah*.

In *Derech HaMelech*, the collection of the Rebbe's pre-war sermons and teachings, the Rebbe writes:

“After the entire period of the *yomim noraim* and *Sukkot*, when the Jewish People has expressed both renewed commitment and unity to one another; as well as displayed an invigorated sense of commitment to Hashem and his *Torah*, we come together and dance with the *sefer Torah*, not solely are we *b'simcha* and rejoicing, but the *Torah* itself is so to speak *b'simcha*, the *Torah* is the proverbial *baal simcha* that is rejoicing with the Jewish People, and we are basking in the *Torah's* joy...”

May each of us merit to experience and recognize the unity, the sacred value of one another, and to bask in the *Torah's* joy as we come together on the *regel achat*, the *yom tov* of *Simchat Torah*. ■