

SHEMINI ATZERET

CHAG SAME'ACH. Today is 22 Tishrei 5786, Shemini Atzeret.
Corresponding to October 14, 2025

TORAH DIALOGUE (p. 345 Birnbaum Machzor)

1. The reading for Shemini Atzeret always starts with the section that deals with taking tithes. The agricultural society was required to give a portion of its produce to a Kohen, and then a tithe for a Levi, and then a separate tithe to be brought to Yerushalayim and eaten there. Although we are not agricultural in our society today, these laws are applicable to all produce grown in Eretz Yisrael. The extension would be the mitzvah to give a tenth of our net profits in business to charity. There is much discussion as to the origin of the mitzvah, be it from the Torah or be it from the rabbis, or be it a custom. Nevertheless it is adhered to across the board. We believe that Hashem rewards us for keeping to the law and the spirit of tithing. Heaven forbid that we should actually go to Yerushalayim, celebrate a holiday, and not have concerned ourselves with proper tithing and charitable giving prior to appearing in front of Hashem. Commentators abound as to the reward for giving the tzedakah and the tithing as prescribed. The feeling of the rabbis was that God compensates in this world for the tzedakah and tithing being given. If a person reaps one hundred bushels of wheat, he is required to tithe the appropriate ten bushels. Midrashically if he gave twenty bushels in the tithing to the Levi, then Hashem will make sure that his lands will produce ten times the twenty, or two hundred bushels. The Midrash felt strongly to connect the following year's produce to the current year's charitable giving.

2. *"Do not harden your heart"* (15:7). If you give a poor person something, the Torah tells you that you are also required to speak pleasantly to him. Do not shout at him; do not become impatient with him. Wealth is only a ransom for a person if the poor person does not hear rebuke. Instead he should be hearing pleasant things. This verse also means that you should speak courteously to the beggar even if you have no money to give him. If you do have money then it is not just the giving that is important, but it is also your attitude and the demonstration of kindness that goes along with your giving. Do not harass the person and certainly do not humiliate the person. I believe that when a poor person approaches us, it is one of the greater tests that God is putting us to. We should look upon this poor person as God's emissary for the purpose of making sure that (a) we commit ourselves to the mitzvah of tzedakah, and (b) that we remind ourselves that truly "it is better to give than to receive." What separates my being the donor, and the poor person being the recipient, is but the *Chessed* of Hashem. Hence, look upon a poor person as your own personal test of affluence.

3. *"You shall rejoice in your festival"* (16:14). Our Sages learn from this verse that we are required to rejoice exclusively in the festival and not detract from it by adding other happy occasions to the festival. Hence, concluded the rabbis, we do not permit marriages to take place during the entire Yom Tov week. The happiness of the wedding should not be mixed with the happiness of the festival. Combining occasions of happiness serves to detract some of the happiness that is now being given to the other occasion. Sukkot is the ultimate in happiness because of the fact that all harvests are complete – the harvesting of the grain, fruits and vegetables. The poor person can now be fully sustained and all of Israel will rejoice.

4. *"You shall be Ach Same'ach"* (16:15). The word "Ach" is difficult to translate. One translator rendered the verse as, "you shall be only happy." This shows that a person should not make himself totally happy to the point where he forgets that God is the source of his happiness. Particularly on Sukkot when he has harvested all his produce, wheat and wine, the verse says "Ach" only showing it in perspective, that is *"diminish your happiness on Sukkot, instead rejoice with trembling"* (Tehillim 2:11). I believe that total simcha affects the person greatly to the point where he believes that he is in control and the simcha is his and his family's to embrace wholeheartedly. The Torah might be cautioning us to make sure that we include Hashem, not just in every day blessings and

petitions, but especially when we reach the point of simcha in our lives. Sukkot is celebrating a spiritual simcha in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur experience, but especially with the emphasis seemingly on physical and material simcha with the successful harvest. Hence it is easy for the simcha to go to our heads and we are reminded to put a lid on it.

SIMCHAT TORAH

CHAG SAME'ACH. Today is 23 Tishrei 5786, Simchat Torah.
Corresponding to October 15, 2025

TORAH DIALOGUE (p. 367 Birnbaum Machzor) V'ZOT HABRACHA וזאת הברכה

1. Moshe blesses all the people of Israel prior to his death similar to the blessings Yaakov gave on his deathbed to his twelve sons. Much is written as to the similarity between the blessings, or prophetic writings as they might be considered. For example Moshe omits entirely the tribe of Shimon, while Yaakov treated Shimon and Levi together as a pair. Ramban suggests in a lengthy explanation that Shimon was omitted because his tribe was not large and ended up being absorbed among the others, and therefore it was included in the blessings of the other tribes. Professor Nechama Leibowitz was unhappy with this explanation. A further difference to be noticed is that Yaakov censures his sons, while Moshe extols the qualities of the tribe of Levi. I suggest that possibly what occurred in the years between Yaakov and Moshe was the test of the tribes. After being censured by Yaakov, Levi ended up rising to the occasion and proving itself as dedicated to Hashem. Levi was the most blessed and righteous of the tribes during the travails of national slavery, and of the travels in the desert. They did not participate in the sins of the Golden Calf, nor the sin of the spies. Shimon, on the other hand, fell deeper into the abyss of sin. Shimon ends up leading the people in the sin of Pe'or – in worshipping idols at that time. It was Pinchas, of the Levitical tribe, who put an end to the sins being perpetrated by the sons of Shimon. Hence Levi rose to the top, while Shimon descended to the bottom.

2. The blessing given to the tribes of Zevulun and Yissachar links them together. We find our Sages commenting that Yissachar were the scholars and Zevulun were the businessmen; it was the division of materialism and spirituality. Moshe placed the two tribes into one verse that led commentators to regard the two tribes as a complementary unit. Rashi commented that the two tribes entered into a partnership. Zevulun would dwell at the sea coast and ply maritime trade and share the profits with Yissachar, who would stay at home and study Torah. The Rambam roundly condemns the approach that people would seek a Yissachar/Zevulun relationship; that one should feel entitled to sit in the Beit Midrash and learn, while somebody else in business should support him. Nobody should depend on charity, even if they do so in order to devote themselves to Torah because it is wrong not to work for a living. It brings the Torah into disrepute. The Rambam also commented that a person should not use Torah as an instrument of livelihood.

3. Moshe was not the first to bless people before his death as indicated earlier about Yaakov, nor was he the last one to do so as we see in the stories of King David and others. There is a greater lesson here in terms of the ability to bless another person. Hashem blessed Adam and he blessed Noah. When he blessed Avraham, Hashem entrusted the concept of blessing into Avraham's hands. At that point Avraham could bless whomever he desired, and whomever he blessed would be so blessed. The Talmud tells us that every human being has the ability to bless another person and the blessing is real and possibly true. Consequently when a person offers to give you a brachah, you should accept it and thank that person because Hashem might be saying Amen to that brachah. The person giving the blessing might be your father, mother or family member, or it could be your rabbi or a Kohen. In actuality it could be a beggar who is ignorant and homeless, yet when that person gives you a brachah, Hashem is listening. This is not only a beautiful concept but a challenging one as well.

4. *"There was a king in Yeshurun"* (33:5). The Chizkuni writes that Moshe was a king over Israel and this became evident when he gathered together the elders of the nation as a king gathers his people. For this reason it was proper that Moshe bless Israel as a king blesses his people. Rashi, though, felt that this verse means that Hashem is King over Israel. It would be many years later that the people had a king of their own. According to the Rambam, the first king, halachically, was Yehoshua as indicated at the end of the first chapter of Yehoshua, which is today's haftarah.

5. *"They will place incense in Your presence...May Hashem bless his wealth..."* (33:10,11). Chazal (Yoma 20) deduced from the juxtaposition of these two verses that the Kohen who sacrificed the Ketoret (incense) became wealthy. R. Yisrael Salanter noted that Ketoret and wealth are related in another way: Ketoret, when used properly, is a life-giving substance which atones for the sins of the people. However, if it is misused, the punishment is death. Similarly, when one utilizes his wealth properly, he can perform the loftiest Mitzvot with it. If, however, he does not use it wisely, he can violate the most severe sins.

6. *"And they are the myriads (ten thousands) of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Menashe"* (33:17). Why was Ephraim blessed with the ability to kill his enemies in the tens of thousands while Menashe was able to kill only in the thousands? The Vilna Gaon notes that the verse in Tehillim (91:7) promises: *"One thousand shall fall from your (left) side, and ten thousand from your right (side)."* Since Ephraim was blessed with Yaakov's right hand (see Bereishit 48:14) and Menashe with his left hand, Ephraim merited the ability to kill ten thousand, while Menashe was only able to kill one thousand. The Gaon's comments notwithstanding, the original question stands and I have no answer.

TORAH QUIZ 5786

- Which of the sons in the Patriarchal family left home?
- Which of these comments are from the Torah, Midrash, or did I make it up?
 - Og held on to the Ark during the Flood.
 - It was Yehudah's idea not to kill Yosef and to throw him into the pit.
 - Shimon and Levi killed all the males of Shechem.
 - Dinah revealed a naked shoulder when she appeared in front of Shechem.
 - Esav married Machalat, daughter of Yishmael.
 - Esav's head was buried in Me'arat HaMachpeilah.
 - Cham castrated his father Noah.
 - The name Babylonia (Bavel) means "confused" because there Hashem caused the people to not understand each other and be scattered.
- How old was
 - Avraham when he left Charan.
 - Yitzchak when he got married.
 - Esav when he got married.
 - Yaakov when he appeared in front of Pharaoh.
 - Noah when the Flood started.
- From which of the sons of Noah did these nations emerge?
 - Greece, b) Germany, c) Egypt, d) Israel, e) Philistines, f) Canaan, and g) Assyria
- What was the original name of a) Israel, b) Beit El, c) Babylonia?
- Where did the following people die?
 - Rachel, b) Yaakov, c) Yehudah, d) Chur, e) Zimri and Kozbi, and f) Miriam.
- Which of these Mitzvot are from the Torah or the Rabbis?
 - Tzitzit, b) Shechita, c) HaMotzi, d) Bensching, e) Hoshanot on Hoshanah Rabbah, and f) Lulav and Etrog on the 2nd day of Sukkot.

- What is the punishment for
 - eating meat and milk together.
 - eating on Yom Kippur.
 - doing work on Shabbat.
 - eating Chametz on Pesach.
 - eating non-Kosher KFC.
- In what month did
 - Hashem forgive Bnei Yisrael for the Golden Calf.
 - Bnei Yisrael worshipped the Golden Calf.
 - The spies gave their evil report on Eretz Yisrael.
 - Haman was hung.
- How long did it take Noah to build the Ark?
- How long did it rain to create the Flood?
- How many times did Moshe ascend Mt. Sinai?
- What three Berachot did Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam bring to Bnei Yisrael in the desert?
- From which nation was
 - Og, b) Bilaam, c) Tzipporah, d) Avraham, and e) Lavan
- What was the first Mitzvah given to man in the Torah?
- What was the first Mitzvah given to Bnei Yisrael?
- From which tribe were the following people?
 - Yehoshua, b) Calev, c) the daughters of Tzelaftchad, d) Korach, and e) Datan and Aviram
- How long did all of Chumash Devarim take? (Give the dates)

ANSWERS TO TORAH QUIZ 5786

- Avraham, Yishmael, Yaakov, and Yosef
- a) Midrash. b) made up; Reuven's idea. c) Torah. d) Midrash. e) Torah. f) Midrash. g) Midrash. h) Torah
- a) Avraham: 75. b) Yitzchak: 40. c) Esav: 40. d) Yaakov: 130. e) Noah: 600.
- a) Greece: Yefet. b) Germany: Yefet. c) Egypt: Cham. d) Israel: Shem. e) Philistines: Cham. f) Canaan: Cham. g) Assyria: Shem.
- a) Israel: Canaan. b) Beit El: Luz. c) Babylonia: Shin'ar.
- a) Rachel: Beit Lechem. b) Yaakov: Egypt. c) Yehudah: Egypt. d) Chur: Mt. Sinai. e) Zimri and Kozbi: Shittim. f) Miriam: Kadesh.
- a) Tzitzit: Torah. b) Shechita: Halachah L'Moshe MiSinai (=Torah). c) HaMotzi: Rabbanan. d) Bensching: Torah. e) Hoshanot: Minhag Nevi'im (=Rabbanan). f) Lulav & Etrog after the first day of Sukkot: Rabbanan.
- a) Makot (Lashes). b) Karet (premature death). c) Sekilah (execution by stoning). d) Karet. e) Makot
- a) Tishrei. b) Tammuz. c) Av. d) Nissan.
- 120 years
- 40 days.
- 3 times.
- Miriam: The Well (water)
Aharon: The Clouds of Glory.
Moshe: The Mannah.
- a) Og: Bashan. b) Bilaam: Midian. c) Tzipporah: Midian. d) Avraham: Ur Kasdim. e) Lavan: Charan.
- Not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge.
- Rosh Chodesh.
- a) Yehoshua: Ephraim. b) Calev: Yehudah. c) Tzelaftchad's daughters: Menasheh. e) Datan and Aviram: Reuven.
- Over 5 weeks; from Rosh Chodesh Shevat until Moshe died on 7 Adar,