

SHEMINI**Uh-huh, Oh Yes, Please Let the Rain Come Down!**

2009 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

SHEMINI ATZERES/SIMCHASTORAH/V'ZOS HABRACHA (Deuteronomy, 33:1-34:12)"Uh-

huh, Oh Yes, Please Let the Rain Come Down!"SHEMINI ATZERES Much of the observance of Sukkos is a subtle "prayer" for rain. Last week we discussed the four species of produce that are held and carried around the synagogue on Sukkos. These items cannot grow and flourish without water. Sukkos is the "Harvest Time Festival," and it is essential that we have the rain we need in order for future crops to grow. On Friday, the last day of Sukkos, we will recite several prayers while holding willows, a plant that requires vast amounts of water to survive. When the Temple stood, they used to pour water onto the Altar every day of Sukkos. Yes, Sukkos is a very water-centric holiday. Yet, throughout the week, we never ask G-d for rain. The reason is quite simple. You don't ask G-d for rain while you are trying to fulfill the Mitzvah of living in the Sukkah. Therefore, we suffice to HINT at a need for rain until the holiday is over. This Friday night, immediately following the 7-day holiday of Sukkos, we will begin the two-day holiday of Shemini Atzeres. (One day in Israel) While there are various customs as to eating and sleeping in the Sukkah on Shemini Atzeres, everyone will be out of the Sukkah by Saturday night. (See "The Loch Ness Sukkah".) On Shemini Atzeres, the Cantor will don his *Kittel*, the white robe worn on Yom Kippur, and, in a Yom Kippur-like tune, recite the Prayer for Rain. The rainy season in Israel begins shortly after Sukkos. The Israeli economy depends upon successful crops in order to flourish. Israel desperately needs G-d's Blessings. It could also use some American dollars. Go visit and spend money!

LET IT POUR!!!!!! ----- **SIMCHAS**

TORAH"Ahead to the Past, and Back to the Future" Whenever someone completes the study of a section of the Torah, he makes a "*Siyum* -- Conclusion" celebration. He publicly reads the closing sections of what he has studied. He then thanks G-d for giving him the opportunity to learn His Torah and to complete the study of this particular topic. We will do the same thing on Saturday night and Sunday morning. The second day of Shemini Atzeres is called "*Simchas Torah* -- Joy of the Torah." The Torah is divided into 54 weekly Torah Portions that are read over the course of a year. (Several of these Torah Portions are doubled up in order to finish within the year. This is necessary because: 1) unless it is a leap year, which, on the Jewish calendar has 13 months, there are fewer than 54 Saturdays in a year; 2) any Saturday that coincides with a major festival has a special Torah Reading, rather than the regular Torah Portion.) After a year of weekly readings, we will conclude the final Portion of Deuteronomy. On Saturday night and Sunday morning, all of the Torahs will be removed from the Ark. Various members of the congregation will take turns carrying the Torahs around the synagogue. This procession is

accompanied by singing and dancing. In many places, especially in Yeshivas, where Torah study is primary, the evening celebrations can continue until the wee hours of the morning, and the morning celebrations can continue until late afternoon. On Simchas Torah, we re-affirm our commitment to keep and to learn G-d's Torah. As soon as we finish the Torah, we go right back to the beginning and start to read Genesis 1:1. We never stop learning. -----

--- **V'ZOS HABRACHA (Deuteronomy, 33:1-34:12) "Mourning for Moses; Morning for Joshua," or, "You Can't See the Future with Tears in Your Eyes"** The Torah closes with the death of Moses. This event was devastating to the Nation of Israel: *"The Children of Israel cried for Moses in the Fields of Moab for 30 days. The days of crying for Moses ended, and Joshua, son of Nun was filled with a spirit of wisdom, since Moses had placed his hands upon him, and the Children of Israel listened to him..."* (Deuteronomy, 34:8-9) *"The days of crying for Moses ended, and Joshua... was filled with a spirit of wisdom..."* What is the connection between the end of the mourning period for Moses, and the wisdom of Joshua? The Sforno comments on this verse that "there is no wisdom or council at a time of crying." A person who is sitting *Shiva* is in no position to give advice; he is too consumed by his own loss to see clearly enough to guide others. Even the great Joshua lacked the composure and insight to lead the Nation of Israel until he was able to dry his tears and look to the future. -----

----- The past year has seen more war and more terrorism and more threats to American, Israeli, and world peace and security. We cannot, we dare not forget all our innocent brethren who have been killed, maimed, and been forced into mourning. We must, as we always have done, pick ourselves up and dust ourselves off. Let us dry our eyes and look to the future with faith. It is time for Genesis 1:1; a new beginning. It is time to enter a brave new world; a world of Peace. A world of Faith. A world of harmony and respect. A world of Torah. Have a Good Shabbos and a Good Yom Tov. Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz