

Beginning Again...Immediately

³⁵'On the eighth day (BeYom Ha'Shemini Atzeret) there shall be for you an assembly. You are to do no regular work' (Nu 29:35).

Kehilat Kol Simcha started on *Sukkot 6, 5783* in Northwood Pines, so according to the Jewish Calendar today is our 30th Anniversary instead of Monday October 17, 2022. Either way, as a congregation, we turn 30 years old at this season. The Hebrew word *shemini* means *eighth*, and the Hebrew word *atzeret* means public assembly. Thus, *Shemini Atzeret* means we are to have a public convocations or assembly, and this year this is on Monday October 17, 2022. *Shemini Atzeret* is also referred to as *Sukkot 8* especially in the Diaspora. So, between today and Monday, inclusive, we have a lot to celebrate.

According to the Torah's commandment, there is only one day – the eight-day from the beginning of *Sukkot* – but since, in the Diaspora, a day is added to festivals, *Sukkot 8* like other festivals, became two days. In the land of Israel, however, it is still one day – and what a day it is! In addition to the regular festival ceremonies, there is also a Prayer for Rain (*Geshem*), and *Yizkor* (literally *I will remember*, in this prayer, our Jewish people entreat *Adonai* to remember the souls of our relatives and friends that have passed on. *Kol Simcha* remembers our beloved Cliff Clifton) – and the celebration that the Diaspora Jews know as *Simchat Torah*, with the delirious singing and dancing that are part of the *Seven Circuits (Hakafot)*, the circling around the synagogue with the *Torah Scrolls*. In Israel, which observes a single day, all the observances are compressed into one day (and we follow the Israeli reckoning), and it is known generally observances are compressed into one day (and we follow the Israeli reckoning), as *Simchat Torah*.

As we come into *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah*, we have come to the conclusion of the festival cycle detailed in *Leviticus 23*. As if to reinforce the beginning of our new year cycle of festivals, *Simchat Torah* concludes our reading of the *Torah (Deut. 33–34)* by immediately launching us into reading the *Torah* from the beginning (*Bereshit*) again. Studying *Adonai's Torah* never ends! Taking a step back and looking at the bigger picture of *Leviticus 23*, it's almost as if *Shemini Atzeret* concludes not only *Sukkot*, not only the fall holidays, but also the entire cycle of festivals described in *Leviticus 23* (remember the entire chapter is read as a unit.) *Shemini Atzeret* is designated simply as the *eighth day* after the end of *Sukkot*. And yet, since our calendar is built on the seven-day week based on the seven days of creation, the eighth day would itself signal a new beginning (Biblically-speaking, eight means new beginning). Appropriately, *Simchat Torah* immediately picks up on this new-beginning theme by renewing our cycle of readings. Additionally, *Simchat Torah* in a sense serves as still another conclusion, this time to *Shavuot*; *Shavuot* is the holiday that celebrates the *giving* of the *Torah* while *Simchat Torah* celebrates our *having and studying Torah*. It is correspondingly for *Kehilat Kol Simcha* as a congregation. We have reached our Biblical maturity (age thirty) to briefly stop & recharge to get ready to keep moving forward in *Adonai*.



A couple of weeks ago we approached and then observed the *Shemithah* as an opportunity for a new start – to start afresh with our lives with *Adonai* and with those around us. Now we can use our anniversary celebration and *Simchat Torah* to remind ourselves of our new intentions and new initiatives as well as to start afresh following *Adonai's* guidelines in the *Torah*. It's yet another opportunity for a new beginning, for a fresh start for each of us and for our congregation

In this fresh start, we should take to heart the concluding text of the Torah (*Deut. 34:10*), which serves as part of the *Simchat Torah* readings. This *Parashah* reminds us that *Adonai* knew Moses face-to-face (*panim al panim*). There was a close, intimate relationship between the two. Moses had come to know the character and person of the God of the universe. He knew him to be a personal God of surpassing

compassion, overflowing love, superabundant kindness, and unrelenting forgiveness (*Exod. 34:6-7*). Accordingly, we need to take the time to get to know the Lord more intimately and to model those same divine characteristics towards others. It's part of our calling as a paradigm people (*Deut. 4:5-8; Exod. 19:5-6*). But the *Parashah* also reminds us that the Lord knew Moses. That means Moses opened himself up to God; he didn't hold anything back from God. We should follow this example as well.

The other part of the *Parashah* for *Simchat Torah, Bereshit* (*Gen. 1:1-2:3*), reminds us of creation and that *Adonai* walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We, too, need to see this year as an opportunity to walk that closely with *Adonai*, taking the time to get to know him better, and opening ourselves more fully to him. As we begin again immediately, this is something we can aim for and build on as we move forward through the coming years. *Shabbat Shalom!*