

We Need Each Other

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today is Shmini Atzeres. Shmini Atzeres is a special holiday by itself. It is a holiday which really does not have any distinguishing characteristics. It does not have the Seder or Matzah of Pesach. It does not have the Shofar of Rosh Hashonna, the all-day fasting of Yom Kippur, the Lulav and Esrog of Succos. It does not even have the blintzes of Shavuos. It is a little holiday. On Succos when the Temple stood we brought 70 sacrifices for the 70 nations of the world. On Shmini Atzeres we bring only one sacrifice. In fact, it is not even known as Chag Shmini Atzeres which would mean the holiday of the 8th day, of assembly but it is known as Shmini Chag Atzeres. The word Shmini comes first. When we discuss the holiday of Shmini Atzeres in the Torah it says L'Chem "it should be for you". This holiday comes at the tail-end of many other holidays. It is just a little holiday.

The Rabbis tell us that we must first discharge our responsibilities toward G-d and men. That's what, the holiday of Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur and Succos are all about. On Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur we discharge our responsibilities toward G-d and on Succos we discharge our responsibilities toward our fellow man. Then the Torah says have a holiday for yourself. That's why we do not call it Chag Shmini Atzeres but Shmini Chag Atzeres. It is the 8th day after you fulfill all your other obligations then you can have a holiday for yourself. But how do we celebrate the holiday for ourselves? We celebrate it the same way we celebrate every other holiday. The important truth here is that we need people to be ourselves. We must relate to them. The more we concentrate just on ourselves the more alienated we become while the more we attach ourselves to others the more we find ourselves.

We all know that this is true. That's why the worst possible punishment is solitary confinement. People go crazy in solitary confinement. We need other people. Those people who say, "I am individual and I need nobody else" are fooling themselves. If this were true why then would it hurt them when somebody dies? But we all know that when a relative or close friend dies it hurts terribly. When a parent dies it is like cutting off a hand or a foot. We are attached to each other and death is a cruel blow. The pain and suffering can be intense. Those people who say, "Well, she was an old lady or old man and everybody has to die" are merely protecting themselves with a defense mechanism so they will not feel pain.

Death is a hard thing. Why G-d had to include it in His plan of creation, only He knows. But what are they going to say? That we should not have loved people? Mourning is the obverse side of the coin of love. Mourning shows that we loved our parents and relatives and that they loved us. Someone once told me why did G-d have to give me such good parents since it hurts so much now? I said, "What did you want, parents who would have abused you, harmed you?"

We all need each other and the love we received from our parents we should pass on to our children and our grandchildren. A story is told about a Rabbi C. Michaelson who learned that the Germans were planning an Axia in his town. He determined that he

would not go when they came for him. The Germans, of course, claimed that they were taking all the Jews to a work camp where things would be much better. After all, didn't the sign read Arbeit Macht Frie, Work Makes Free? Rabbi Michaelson knew better. He knew that the cattle cars were going to take them to Treblinka where they would be gassed and burned and he did not want to be burned. He wanted a proper Jewish funeral. He wanted to be buried. He would rather be shot here by the Nazis with the hope that later he would be found and buried rather than cremated. When the Nazis burst into the room he stood facing them, a tall majestic figure with his tephillin on and clothed and wrapped in his tallis with his white flowing hair and beard glistening. The Gestapo Officer took one look at him and said, "My G-d, it is Moses!" and he slammed the door shut. Rabbi Michaelson then turned to the window. He looked and there below he could see his fellow Jews being rounded up and herded into the trucks ready to go to the cattle cars to Treblinka. He then thought in spite of the miracle that was done for him today, in spite of his own desire to have a burial he realized that those Jews needed him. How could he just, for the hope of a burial instead of being burned, forsake them? He would be able to give them aid and comfort so he walked down the stairs and entered the trucks with them. Rabbi Michaelson was able to help them for a year or less before he was gassed and he was burned. But he knew that he needed to help them. He needed to be with them.

Today there are many who do not realize that they need the generations before them and the generations after them. Many young people do not want to have children. They do not want to be concerned about their parents. They only want to be concerned about themselves. All they are interested in is their own grave. It will not help them. It will only destroy them. We all need each other. That's what this holiday of Shmini Atzeres is about. Even when you are doing it for yourself, even when you have a holiday for yourself you need others.

Let us always learn to live such lives. Let us repay our parents' dedication by being dedicated to our children and grandchildren.