

Shmini Atzeres

G-d's Love, Positive Love, Destructive Love, and Us

In a little while we will be saying *yizkor*. We will remember those who came before us, those who shaped us and molded us, those who made us the way we are. It is strange that we are saying *yizkor* today. Among the Sephardim *yizkor* is only said once a year, on *Yom Kippur*. Among the Ashkenazim *yizkor* is said four times a year. It is said at *Yom Kippur* and, also, at the end of every one of the three pilgrim holidays. We say *yizkor* today because the rabbis in northern France about 1,000 years ago determined that we should say *yizkor* on this day. What was it that caused them to feel that we should say *yizkor* on *Shmini Atzeres*?

What is *Shmini Atzeres* anyway? *Shmini Atzeres* is a holiday unique and special. It is different than *Succos*. *Shmini Atzeres* is a holiday all by itself. We are not obligated to take the *lulav* and *esrog* on it. We are not even obligated to sit in the *succah* on it. We sit in the *succah* in the *Diaspora* because we were not sure upon which day would fall *Succos* and which day would be *Shmini Atzeres* when we lived in Babylon. In the land of Israel they do not sit in the *succah* at all on *Shmini Atzeres*. *Shmini Atzeres* is a unique and special holiday because this is a holiday on which G-d shows His love for us, and we show our love for G-d. On the holiday of *Succos* we pray for all the nations of the world. We brought seventy different sacrifices when the Temple stood representing the seventy nations of the world. On *Rosh Hashona* and *Yom Kippur* we prayed first for the world and then we prayed for the people of Israel and then for ourselves. We have been working hard these past few weeks trying to bring redemption to the world. We have been trying to help G-d make this a better world. G-d on this holiday tells us, "Stay a little while. Be with Me a little while. I appreciate your efforts. I just want You to be with me one more day." This is a day of *Cheeah*, a day of love.

We all know that when we love somebody, it is just enough to be with them. We and they do not have to say anything. We all know that when we come home from a hard day's work and we see our spouse, it makes us feel good just to see our spouse. Widows and widowers know especially that there is nothing more terrifying and nothing more depressing than coming home to an empty house, a house in which your loving

companion had lived for many years. We know that just being in the presence of someone you love is enough. You do not really have to do anything. Oh, you make idle conversation, but the conversation does not really impart much information. It is just letting the other person know that you are there and that you like being in that other person's presence. That is really what *Shmini Atzeres* is all about. G-d tells us, "I love you. I care for you. I want you to be with Me just one more day before you go back to your pursuits. Be with Me a little bit more. Let's spend a little time, just you and me together, not really doing much. You do not have to take *matzoh* or a *Torah* or a *lulav* or *esrog*. You do not have to pray for the whole world. Just be together with Me for a little bit more." *Shmini Atzeres* is a holiday of *Cheeah*, a holiday of love.

It is, also, interesting to note that this holiday is called *Shmini Chag Hatzeres*, "the eighth," the holiday of stopping. It is not called the holiday of the eighth day of assembly in Hebrew. Instead, it is called "the eighth," the holiday of stopping, the holiday of reflection, so to speak. Why should this be so?

We all know that we live in six dimensions. We live in the dimensions of north, east, south, west, up, and down. We also know that there is a seventh dimension in the world, the spiritual dimension. We know that just as in the physical dimensions you have to create things, you have to create a house, you have to prepare your food; in the spiritual dimension, also, you have to create a *Shabbos*, a *yontif*, a holiday. You have to create the correct atmosphere in your home and in all your relationships in order to have full spirituality. The number "eight" stands for something that is beyond reason, beyond logic, for example, the love that a mother has for her child, the love that spouses have for each other, the love that a person has for his country or people. It is something that just exists. It is illogical sometimes, but we know that it is there and that it is powerful. We know, too, that this is the type of love that G-d has for us and that we have, too, for G-d.

However, we all know, too, that love can, also, be a very destructive force. Love is not always a positive force. We all have read about women who have ever killed their own children because their lover did not want them and they did not want to lose their lover. We know love can be very,

very destructive in many different ways.

Shmini Atzeres tells us that when we love, this illogical thing, we must stop and reflect upon it in order to tell you whether it is a positive love or a destructive love. *Shmini Atzeres*, the *Gemorah* says, involves two concepts, *Pezar Uvshav*, which means scatter and listen. The rabbis say that *Pezar* means that we are leaving the holiday season to go to our worldly pursuits in which we may misuse love. In the world there is always going to be trouble. The "Pay" in *Pezar* stands for "Payes," for "a lottery." Some win in life, some lose in life. Some are up now and down later. We all know that in life we need *mazel*, luck, and many times in life our luck changes, but we must always maintain our equilibrium. We cannot take out on our spouse or our children our frustrations because we had a bad day or a business deal fell through. It's so easy to take our frustrations out on our spouse. After all, who else can we take our frustrations out on? A stranger will walk away. It is only someone who loves you and cares for you who will put up with our frustrations. The rabbis say, be careful how you treat your spouse. There should be no battering in a Jewish home. Be careful how you treat your children. There should be no child abuse. Be careful how you treat your parents. There should be no parent abuse as, unfortunately, we find today some older people are being mistreated by their children just for the sake of their social security check.

The "Zayin" in *Pezar* stands for "Zeman," which means "time," and we mark time by saying *Shecheyanu*. We sometimes say *Shecheyanu* when a holiday comes, when times are good and sometimes we say *Shecheyanu* when times are bad. A holiday comes, and we may not have the food or the wherewithal to celebrate it properly. However, we still must be joyful and grateful and not take out our frustrations on others. The "Resh" in *Pezar* stands for "Regel" because *Shmini Atzeres* is a holiday by itself, which means that it is treated like every other holiday. We know that when you finish sitting *shiva* before *Succos*, even if it is only a *shiva* of a few hours, the *shiva* counts for seven days, *Succos* itself counts for seven days, and *Shmini Atzeres*, although it is only one day, also counts for seven days. *Shmini Atzeres* tells us that even if we have suffered a tragedy, we cannot take it out on the people we love.

In life there is going to be mourning. Unfortunately, there is going to

be pain and suffering and death, but we should never take out our own fear of death or our grief on others.

The rabbis ask, how can we tell the difference between a destructive love and a true love? The rabbis say that we can tell the difference from the word "*Keshav*," which means "to listen." We must listen to the people we love. The "*Kuf*" stands for *Karbones*, which means sacrifice. When a mother loves her child, she gets up at night and feeds him every three hours. True love demands sacrifice. It is interesting to note that when a mother suckles her baby, the baby takes and takes and takes, but if the mother for some reason has to stop nursing and the baby is bottle fed, her milk dries up by itself. People who stop giving pretty soon find it very difficult to give. That's why in Jewish law every person on charity has to give charity. Otherwise, his capacity to give, his soul, will dry up and he will not be able to give, even when he becomes rich. True love demands sacrifice, mutual sacrifice. If only one spouse is willing to sacrifice for the other, while the other spouse is not willing to do anything for the other spouse, that is not true love; that is abuse. The "*Shin*" in the *Keshiv* stands for "song." When you are with our spouse, you should be happy. Many times engaged couples have come to me and one of them tells me outside the presence of the other, "You know, I love my fiance but I am so miserable when I am with him," I always tell that person, "Don't marry him." Love should make you happy. It should make you sing. It should not make you miserable. But the person will say, "But I love him/her." I then always answer, "You may, but that is a destructive love, not a true love." The last letter in the word *Keshiv* is a "*Beis*," which stands for *Brocho*, a blessing. If you love someone, that person should bring out the best in you, not the worst in you. Unfortunately, sometimes when people fail, the worst in them is brought out, not the best. If the person whom you love brings out the worst in you, not the best in you, then you should know that this is a destructive love. *Shmini Atzeres* teaches us about love. It teaches us what true love is and what destructive love is. A love which ends in battering and disgrace and tragedy is a love we should run away from. We should scatter from. *Shmini Atzeres* teaches us that in order to be a true love, we must listen to the needs of our beloved. There has to be mutual sacrifice, there has to be a song, happiness, and joy. There has to be blessing. Love must bring out the

best in us. Just as a mother is willing to sacrifice for her baby and, as her baby gives her such joy and happiness and brings out the best in her, so should true love do the same for us.

I am reminded of the story they tell about Luba. Luba had just gotten off the plane at Ben Gurion Airport. She did not have much luggage, just a little piece of hand luggage and her purse. She was in a half daze. She did not know why she had really come. Her neighbors had insisted. It was 1985. She was not a young woman any more, but she swept through customs and, as she went out the door, a young lady named Chana (she did not know her name at that time) beckoned to her and said, "Come here, *Saftah*." Chana was sitting in a *Sherut*. She was pregnant, and she was anxious to get to *Yerushalayim*. A *sherut* is a taxi which has three seats in the back, three jump seats, and a seat in the front. The driver will not leave the airport until he gets his seven passengers. On the top of the *Sherut* he will pile up the luggage. Chana kept insisting, "*Saftah*, come, come." Luba looked quizzically and thought to herself, "*Saftah*, how could I be a *Saftah*? How could I be a grandmother?" She liked the way the woman talked, though, so she approached the *Sherut*. A burly man came to her in his 50's, the driver of the taxi, and asked her if she had any luggage. She said no, only the hand luggage. He told her that he would put it on top anyway because there would not be room to put it on the seats, so she gave it to him, and he gave her a big smile. She climbed into the back seat. In the *Sherut* there was Chana, who was obviously pregnant, and next to her was a woman from Scandanavia who did not seem to know English or any Hebrew. Luba sat down next to her. In the jump seat there was a *yeshiva bochor*, a boy who looked like he just came from America. Next to him was a man who looked like a businessman dressed in a travel suit, and next to him sat someone who looked like he was a Hebrew University student. In the front seat was a corpulent man, also in a business suit. Luba got in, the *Sherut* driver closed the door, and the driver started to make his way out of Ben Gurion Airport. It was bumpy. They are always fixing the roads in and about the Ben Gurion Airport. Finally, the driver got out on the highway to *Yerushalayim*. Gottlieb, the man who sat in the front, started to act as master of ceremonies. He said, "My name is Gottlieb, and I am a travel agent, and I would like to know who everybody else is here and what they do. He

turned to the pregnant girl and said, "What about you?" She said in Hebrew, "My husband is the principal of a girls' *yeshiva* in *Yerushalayim* and I am from New Jersey. I went home to visit to see my sister, but the doctor told me I could have my baby at any time so I decided I wanted my baby to be born in *Yerushalayim* so I came home." The *yeshiva bochor* who was from America translated her words immediately into English so Luba and the others could understand, although he quickly saw that the Scandinavian girl did not understand English either. Luba thanked the boy for translating. Gottlieb turned to the Scandinavian girl but she could not understand Hebrew or English. Then he turned to the *yeshiva bochor* and asked him what he was doing. He said he was studying at the *yeshiva*, was married and had two little kids. Then Gottlieb turned to the businessman and asked him what he was doing. He answered, "My name is Roth. I am from Bnai Brak and I deal in jewelry. I have been in the United States and made a few sales. Business could have been better, but I am home now." The *yeshiva bochor* translated that, too, for Luba. Then Gottlieb turned to the Hebrew University boy and asked, "What about you?" He said, "Well, I just finished the army a few months ago, and I decided to join my friends in Los Angeles." There was a gasp from the taxi. The young man said, "Wait a minute. I came back. I am going to go to Hebrew University." Then Gottlieb turned, and he said, "I am a travel agent. If I can help you in any way, please call on me" and he told them his address in *Yerushalayim*. Then he turned to Luba and said, "Tell us about you." The *yeshiva bochor* translated the Hebrew, and she said, "I don't feel like talking." Gottlieb remonstrated with her and said, "Everybody told us about what they were doing. Why don't you tell us, too?" She said, "I don't feel like talking." Some of the people in the taxi said that she should talk and some said that she did not have to talk. Suddenly, the driver piped up and said, "Quiet, quiet. If she doesn't want to talk, she doesn't have to talk. She looks like a fine lady. Leave her alone." Luba liked the way the taxi driver talked and said, "Okay, I'll tell you my story." She said, "I am a Holocaust survivor, and I have come to Israel in order to join the Holocaust Survivors Convention from Poland. When the Nazis came into our town, they rounded everybody up. It was a terrible rainy day and we were all forced to come. My husband, Aaron, my three girls, and my boy to the assembly point at the

town square. There was a Nazi officer there. He took one look at my boy and he said, 'Go to the right and the rest of you go to the left.' My husband lurched to the right with my son and was shot immediately on the spot. My girls and I were loaded into a truck and sent to Auschwitz. My girls did not last long in Auschwitz. They were killed almost immediately. It broke my heart, and I almost died myself, but I had one hope, one prayer. My prayer was that my boy was still alive. If we were sent to the left, to death, maybe my boy was sent to the right, to life. After the war I searched for my boy all over. I went to the Red Cross, to all the organizations. Nobody knew what happened to him. All these years I have been hoping to find him, but to no avail. My friends prevailed upon me, though, to come to this convention. 'Maybe you will find him,' they said. I have come to Israel to go to *Yerushalayim* where the convention is. Maybe I will find my son." Roth piped up and said, "How can you find your son? He must be over 50 years old now. How will you be able to recognize him?" Gottlieb said, "Yeah, how is it possible?" The *yeshiva* boy said, "Leave her alone. Maybe she will be able to find her boy." Then Chana, the pregnant girl said, "But what plan do you have, Luba, in order to find your boy?" She said, "Well, I did not know exactly what to do so my friends gave me an idea what to do. It is very American but maybe I will be able to find my boy." Out of her purse she took out a t-shirt and on the t-shirt it said, "I am Luba Cernak from Loge. I am looking for my son, Mordechai Yisroel, born the 12th day of *Kislev* 5796." Everybody looked at the shirt and was amazed. Gottlieb asked if he could hold the shirt. He showed it to the driver. All of a sudden, as if the taxi hit a bump, the driver banged on the brakes and let out a primordial scream, "Mama, mama!!!"

We all know how much we owe to those who have gone before us. They gave us all true love. They sacrificed for us. They brought out the best in us, and we always new that we were they joy. Let us all hope and pray that all of us will only love and project positive love so that truly we will be worthy of G-d's love so the *Mashiach* will come quickly in our day. Amen.