

Date: 16 Tammuz 5786 (July 1, 2026)

Torah Portion: Pinchas

Topic: A Simple Menu

It is written: “You shall offer a burnt offering, a fire offering, a pleasing aroma to YHWH: one bull, one ram, and seven male lambs a year old, without blemish” (Num. 28:27). At first glance, the offerings of Shemini Atzeret seem surprisingly modest when compared with the abundant sacrifices offered throughout the seven days of Sukkot. Yet the Sages saw profound significance in this reduction.

The Midrash compares the matter to a king who hosted a magnificent seven-day banquet and invited all the citizens of his kingdom. After the festival concluded, the king turned to his beloved friend and said, “We have fulfilled our obligation toward all the people. Now remain with me one more day. Let us enjoy one another's company with whatever simple meal you can provide—even a small portion of meat, fish, or vegetables.” In the same way, during the seven days of Sukkot, Yisrael offered sacrifices on behalf of the seventy nations of the world. But on the eighth day, YHWH says to His covenant people, “Remain with Me.” The offerings are reduced to a single bull, one ram, and seven lambs—not because the day is less significant, but because intimacy requires neither extravagance nor display.

This raises two important questions. Why is the celebration of Shemini Atzeret deliberately modest? And why is this unique day attached specifically to Sukkot rather than to Passover or Shavuot?

R' Moshe Feinstein explains that the answer lies in understanding the very structure of creation. YHWH fashioned the world so that no individual, community, or nation can exist in complete self-sufficiency. Human life depends upon an intricate network of farmers, craftsmen, merchants, laborers, scholars, physicians, and rulers. Likewise, nations depend upon one another through trade, cooperation, and the exchange of resources. This interdependence was not an accident of history but part of the Creator's design.

Because humanity is interconnected, peace becomes more than a moral virtue; it is essential for human flourishing. When nations live in harmony, commerce prospers, societies flourish, and countless people benefit from the exchange of goods, knowledge, and culture. War, however, tears apart this delicate fabric, bringing suffering not only to the combatants but also to countless innocent people whose lives depend upon peaceful cooperation.

For this reason, the seventy bulls offered during Sukkot correspond to the seventy nations of the world (cf. Genesis 10). The Talmud explains that these sacrifices were offered for the welfare of all humanity. Had the nations understood how much blessing they received through the Temple service, they would have protected it rather than sought its destruction (Talmud). Yisrael's priestly calling therefore extended beyond itself; it interceded for the peace, prosperity, and stability of the entire world.

Yet experience demonstrates that peace cannot be secured by economic interest alone. One might expect that every rational nation would avoid conflict because war destroys wealth, disrupts commerce, and brings immeasurable hardship. Just as a merchant values his customers and seeks lasting relationships rather than fleeting gain, so nations should recognize the mutual benefits of cooperation.

History, however, tells a different story. Ambition, pride, jealousy, and the pursuit of honor repeatedly overcome reason. Even when people know that conflict will ultimately destroy both themselves and others, they continue to pursue it. The root problem is spiritual rather than political.

Scripture illustrates this vividly through Haman, who confessed, “Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordechai the Yehudi sitting at the king's gate” (Est. 5:13). Haman possessed extraordinary wealth, influence, and royal favor, yet one perceived insult consumed him. His desire for personal honor outweighed every blessing he already possessed. The craving for self-exaltation proved stronger than gratitude or wisdom.

The Sages repeatedly identify pride as the source of conflict. “Jealousy, lust, and the pursuit of honor remove a person from the world” (Pirkei Avot 4:21). Likewise, “Who is honored? He who honors others” (Pirkei Avot 4:1). When honor becomes life's supreme goal, peace inevitably becomes expendable.

A Daily Bread

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The Torah therefore concludes Sukkot with the quiet intimacy of Shemini Atzeret. After seven days devoted to praying for the nations, YHWH invites His people into His presence with a simple meal. The message is unmistakable: lasting peace begins not with political treaties or economic prosperity, but with rightly ordered hearts. A person who understands that this present life is temporary will not sacrifice righteousness for prestige or relationships for ambition.

King Shleomo expressed this perspective when he wrote, “Vanity of vanities... all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2). This world is but a corridor leading to the eternal dwelling (Pirkei Avot 4:16). Material possessions, social status, and earthly honor are temporary gifts rather than ultimate goals. When they become idols, conflict follows; when they are held lightly, peace becomes possible.

Shemini Atzeret thus completes the spiritual journey of Sukkot. After laboring as intercessors for the entire world, Yisrael is reminded that the foundation of universal peace is personal communion with YHWH. The reduced sacrifices proclaim that fellowship with the Creator does not depend upon abundance but upon faithful devotion. As the prophet Micah declared, “He has shown you, O man, what is good... to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your Elohim” (Mic. 6:8).

The Renewed Covenant echoes this same principle. Yehoshua HaMoshiach said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of Elohim” (Matt. 5:9). True peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the fruit of hearts reconciled to Elohim. Likewise, the apostle Paul the Apostle exhorts believers, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Rom. 12:18), reminding us that such peace flows from minds transformed by the will of Elohim rather than by worldly ambition.

Shemini Atzeret therefore teaches that genuine peace begins in worship. The seventy offerings of Sukkot reveal YHWH's compassion for all nations, while the single offering of the eighth day reveals His desire for intimate fellowship with His covenant people. Only those who learn to be satisfied with the simple joy of walking with their Creator are truly equipped to become instruments of peace in the world. Their security rests not in possessions, honor, or power, but in the abiding presence of YHWH—a relationship that overflows into justice, humility, and peace among all people.

Shalom.