

## Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah

**This fact sheet on the holiday comes from Jewish Care.**

Shemini Atzeret comes one day before Simchat Torah. These festivals happen right after the festival of Succot and are separate festivals. Both Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are festival days like Shabbat and you cannot work on these days.

### Shemini Atzeret

Shemini Atzeret means “the assembly of the eighth (day)”. It is often thought of like this: G-d invites us as guests to his home for a week, but when the time comes for us to leave, he has had so much fun that he asks us to stay another day.

During the morning service on Shemini Atzeret, Yizkor (the memorial prayer) is normally said for close family relatives: a parent, siblings, child or spouse who has passed away. Some people can become emotional when the prayer is read, but they will still want the names of their loved ones to be read out at the service.

### Simchat Torah

Simchat Torah means “Rejoicing in the Torah”. It marks the end of the annual cycle of weekly Torah (Hebrew Bible) readings.

Each week in synagogue, we read a few chapters from the Torah, starting with Genesis Ch. 1 and working our way around to Deuteronomy Ch. 34.

On Simchat Torah, we read the last Torah portion and then we read the first straight away. This is to remind us that the Torah is a circle and never ends.

### A time to party?

The ending and beginning of the Torah readings are a time to celebrate. People go around the synagogue carrying the Torah scrolls, singing and dancing. As many people as possible are given the honour of carrying a Torah scroll around the synagogue, which are carried around the synagogue seven times.

Children do not carry the scrolls (they are too heavy), but often follow the people carrying the scrolls round the synagogue, sometimes carrying their own small toy Torahs. Simchat Torah is also a festival where people will have an alcoholic drink or two!

A special honour is given to the people who read the last and first portions of the Torah. They are called Chatan Torah (Bridegroom of the Law) and Chatan Bereshit (Bridegroom of the beginning).

If you are having a party, you can make Israeli flags and/or small Torah scrolls to serve as decorations. You can also arrange Israeli dance lesson or ask a group to perform Israeli dancing. Finally, invite your guests to participate in a quiz that tests their knowledge of biblical characters.

Schedule for Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah

Shemini Atzeret (evening)

- Services take place.
- Festive candles are lit before supper.
- Kiddush is recited.
- Challah bread is eaten after the blessing has been said.
- The festive meal is served.

Shemini Atzeret (day)

- Services take place: this is when Yizkor is said.
- Kiddush is recited before lunch.
- Challah bread is eaten after the blessing.
- The festive meal is served.

Simchat Torah (evening)

- Evening service may take place for Simchat Torah. The Succah is not used.
- Festive candles are lit.

- Kiddush is recited before supper and residents should be offered wine or grape juice.
- Challah bread is then eaten after the blessing.
- The festive meal is served.

#### Simchat Torah (evening)

- Service may take place.
- Kiddush is recited before lunch.
- Challah bread is then eaten after the blessing.
- Festive meal is served.

Appropriate greetings for this festival are “Good Yomtov” or “Chag Sameach”.