Parashat Shemini Atzeret | Deuteronomy 14 :22 –17:17

Theme: "Rejoice always."
One of the shortest verses in the Bible,
framing joy as a continuous spiritual discipline (1 Thess 5:16).

The often-called eighth day of *Sukkot* is really a separate holiday called ***Shemini Atzeret***, the Eighth Day of Holy Convocation. It commemorates God's desire to spend another day with the people, to have them stay with God just a little longer now that *Sukkot* has ended. On this day, also called *Yom Tov*, all the laws of the festivals and the Sabbath apply in the same way.

In the liturgy, *Shemini Atzeret* is also called *Z'man Simchatenu*, which includes the biblical injunction and the *mitzvah* to rejoice in the Season of Rejoicing. On this day, the Prayer for Rain is also designated for recitation immediately after the *Sukkot* festival.

The Torah portion of *Shemini Atzeret* [Deut 14:22 – 16:17] stresses the care of the widow, orphan and stranger. Those who are poor should be given food, shelter and clothing daily as needed. This is the social obligation and the fragile *sukkah* is the ideal place to fulfil this *mitzvah* for there will never cease to be needy ones in your land [Deut 15:11 cf. Mt 26:11, Mk 14:7 and Jn 12:8].

Reflection:
Biblical joy is not treated merely as a spontaneous feeling, but as a deliberate choice and a command. Reflect on what might be some of the typical characteristics of the *mitzvah* of ideal biblical joy which remains stable regardless of outward life circumstances.

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