



Simchat Torah

The ninth day, associated with Sukkot but a separate, full holiday itself, is a time of grand rejoicing for the entire community. In each synagogue, the Torah scrolls are taken out and carried around in a series of processions, often accompanied by dancing. On Simchat Torah, the cycle of reading from the Torah is ended with Deuteronomy 34 and begun again with Genesis 1. Reform and some Conservative Jews, along with all Jews living in the State of Israel, combine Simchat Torah with Shemini Atzeret, omitting the ninth day.

At the conclusion of reading a book of the Torah we say: ***“Chazak, chazak, venitchazek”***—Be strong, be strong, and let us be of good courage to build a living Judaism through commitment and action.



Hoshana Rabba

The seventh day of Sukkot is a half-holiday in itself—the Great Hosanna, or Hoshana Rabba, the day on which the gates of judgment are finally shut.

Shemini Atzeret

The eighth day of Sukkot is a full holiday, on which prayers for rain are recited. It serves to remind us that the fertility of the land in the coming year is being determined, and we pray that the future is productive. A memorial service is also held.

A Guide to Sukkot



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Sukkot

Sukkot begins two weeks after Rosh Hashanah, and marks the end of the High Holy Day period of penitence and looking inward. It lasts nine days, from the 15th to 23rd of Tishrei.

Preparations for Sukkot begin right after Yom Kippur with the building of the *sukkah*, a fragile booth of leaves and latticework. Some Sukkot celebrants literally carry out God’s command to “dwell in the sukkah,” while rabbinic tradition holds taking one’s meals in the sukkah fulfills God’s commandment. We call this commandment to mind at the beginning of each meal in the sukkah by reciting a special blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוֵּנוּ לֵשֵׁב בַּסֻּכָּה.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Haolam,
asher kidshanu bemitzvotav ve-tzivanu leshev
ba-sukkah.*

Blessed are You, Our Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified us through Your commandments and commanded us to dwell in the sukkah.

We add an additional blessing the first time during the holiday that we eat in the sukkah:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁהֲחַיֵּנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Haolam,
she-he-cheyanu, ve-ki-ye-manu, ve-hi-ge-yanu
lazman hazeh.*

Blessed are You, Our Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, Who has given us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season.



Chaplain (Captain) David Frommer, U.S. Army, begins decorating a sukkah in Kuwait for Sukkot 5773.

Many Meanings

The celebration has a number of names and meanings. It is variously known as:

The Feast of Booths (*Sukkot*), a reminder of the journey of our ancestors after the Exodus, when they lived in booths in the desert.

The Holiday of Ingathering (*Hag ha-Asif*), marking the final harvest of the agricultural year. More than any other festival, Sukkot emphasizes the rich endowment of nature and the bounties of the harvest. It was this spirit of thanksgiving that inspired the seventeenth century pilgrims on the American continent.

The Season of Joy (*Zeman Simchatenu*), a fulfillment of the Biblical verse: “They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy” (Psalm 126.5)

“Serve the Lord With Gladness”

Joy is a Jewish duty. Sukkot, the longest, happiest and most colorful of festivals, provides Jewish life with its most intensive opportunity to fulfill that mandate. Traditionally, Jews share the joy, inviting at least one other person without a sukkah to join in each meal in the booth.

In a custom called *ushpizin*, this invitation is also symbolically extended to such biblical giants as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David, each of whom also represents an aspect of God’s persona. Some Jews have expanded this welcoming to the great men and women from more recent Jewish history.

Along with the sense of joy, however, there is a wistful awareness of the waning of the year, of all harvests ended, the days growing shorter, winter approaching. We are reminded of the cyclical nature of human life, with sowing and reaping, struggle and fulfillment succeeding each other, as do the seasons.

Sometimes called “the house that Israel built,” the sukkah reminds us of the historically unsheltered, vulnerable existence of the Jewish people and of the poor at all times. It sensitizes us to the frailty and transitory nature of human life, inspiring us to share what we have with others in need and to replenish the earth.

Lulav and Etrog



Besides the sukkah, essential elements in the rituals of Sukkot are the *lulav* and *etrog*. Their use is commanded in Leviticus 23 to represent the autumn vegetation for which thanks is given during the holiday services.

The *lulav* is a palm branch to which are tied myrtle and willow.

The *etrog* is a yellow citron, representing the “fruit of beautiful trees” that God commanded Jews to pick in the autumn harvest.

They are held together during the blessings, the recitation of Psalms, and *Hoshanot* prayers accompanying a procession around the sanctuary.