



# Sukkot

Sukkot is one of the three major pilgrimage festivals of the Jewish year. At the time of the Temple in Jerusalem, Jews would come from all over Israel to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival - Sukkot is known by a number of different names, each signifying a different aspect of the holiday.

## The Feast of Booths

Sukkot reminds us of the forty years of wandering in the wilderness after our freedom from Egypt. During those years, the Jews could not live in a permanent home; so they lived in huts and booths. Remembering that wandering of our ancestors, the Torah commands us by saying, *"Ye shall dwell in booths seven days - that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt."*

Thus, the first aspect of the holiday relates to the Sukkah, and we are commanded to build and live in a hut or tabernacle. The first two days of Sukkot are Yom Tov, festival days, with many of the laws similar to those of the Sabbath. Then, there are five intermediary days called Chol Hamo'ayd, which, while still the holiday, are much like weekdays in that we can go to work and resume most usual activities. There then begins a new holiday, which in the Diaspora is celebrated on two days. The first is called Shemini Atzeret, and it is followed the next day by Simchat Torah. These two days are also Yom Tov, full holy days, in which we're not permitted to go to work.

## The Festival of Ingathering

Sukkot also has a strong agricultural component. Our ancestors completed the fall harvest & thanked G-d for the bounty they'd received. Sukkot then, is really the 1<sup>st</sup> recorded celebration of Thanksgiving.

## The Season of Rejoicing

Because of the great joy with which the festival was celebrated, Sukkot is referred to as the most joyous of all festivals, and thus is called in the Prayer Book, *"The Season of Our Rejoicing."*

## Sukkot Observances

The two main ritual observances of the festival are eating in the Sukkah, and fulfilling the obligation of making the prayer with the Lulav and Etrog during each of the days of Sukkot, except for the Sabbath. A Sukkah is a building consisting of a minimum of two walls and a beginning of a third, supporting a temporary roof, holding the sechach, which is anything that grew in the ground and is no longer attached.

Over the last few years, some members of Temple Beth Am have undertaken to build their own family Sukkah. Many, having done it for the first time, have now turned it into an annual family event.

## Lulav and Etrog

The other significant and unique ritual for Sukkot is the taking together of the four species. The Lulav, the palm frond, is attached with willows and myrtle twigs, and in the other hand we hold the Etrog, the Citron, Holding all four together, each day we make the blessings, and at services, we have a procession called Hoshanot, at which time all of the people who have the set of four species parade in a circle around the Sanctuary while chanting special prayers.

## Sukkot Visitation by The Rabbi

It will be Rabbi Plotkin's pleasure to visit and to have a L'chaim with every member who builds a Sukkah. Once you know that you will have a Sukkah, call the Rabbi's office to schedule a time then he can be with you and your family in your Sukkah.

## Hoshana Rabba

The seventh day of Sukkot is known as Hoshana Rabba. During the morning services, the procession with the Etrog and Lulav is repeated seven times while the reader chants the Hoshanot hymns asking for G-d's help.

Towards the end of the service, branches of willows are beaten so that our sins, symbolically, fall just as the willow leaves drop off.

## Shemini Atzeret

Shemini Atzeret, the eighth day of Sukkot, is in effect a separate holiday. We are no longer obligated to remain in the Sukkah. During the service, we pray for rain in Israel to nourish the crops.

## Simchat Torah

Simchat Torah, the happiness of the Torah, is the day on which we conclude the annual cycle of Torah readings and begin the cycle again from Genesis. In the evening and in the morning all the Sifrei Torah are removed from the ark and carried in a procession seven times around the congregation while the children follow with their flags. This procession is called "Hakafot" (circling). During the Hakafot, there is a great deal of singing and dancing.