

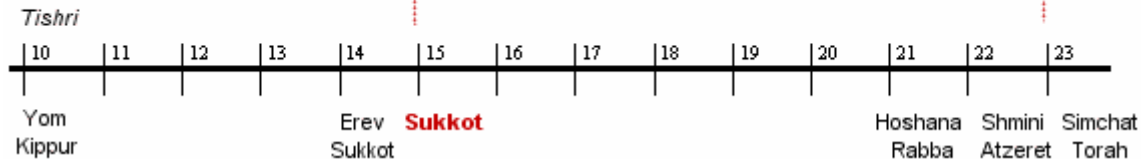


The Festival of Sukkot -

The Feast of Tabernacles

click timeline

Season of our Joy



Introduction to Sukkot

The seventh (and final) feast given to Israel is called *Sukkot*, or the “Feast of Tabernacles.” Sukkot is observed in the fall, from the 15th to the 22nd of Tishri. During this time many Jewish families construct a *sukkah*, a small hastily built hut in which meals are eaten throughout the festival.



The *sukkah* is used to remember the huts [plural: *sukkot*] Israel lived in during their 40 year sojourn in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt. Later, after Israel entered the land of promise, Sukkot was associated with the fall harvest and came to be known as ***Chag ha-Asif***, the Festival of Ingathering (of the harvest). Certain customs are observed during Sukkot, including decorating the *sukkah*, performing special “wave” ceremonies of the “Four Species,” circling the synagogue in a processional while singing hymns (*hakafot*), and reciting Hebrew blessings to sanctify the festival.

During the first and last day of Sukkot no normal “work” (*melakhah*) is permitted (see Leviticus 23:39). The intervening days of Sukkot are called *Chol Ha-Mo’ed*, half-holidays during which usual work activities are permitted. Since it is an eight day festival, there is always at least one Sabbath that occurs during the festival.

From Yom Kippur to Sukkot

On the Jewish calendar, there is a quick transition from the somber time of the Jewish High Holidays (Rosh HaShanah through Yom Kippur) to the festival of Sukkot. In fact, most observant Jews will begin discussing preparations for their *sukkah* immediately following the Havdalah ceremony of Yom Kippur.



Recall that preparation for the High Holidays began back at the start of Elul, when Moses is said to have ascended Mount Sinai the second time and stayed there 40 days until Tishri 10 (the original Yom Kippur). After this period of *teshuvah* [repentance], Moses descending the mountain and gave instructions regarding the building of God's Sukkah (called the *mishkan* [tabernacle]). According to Jewish tradition, material for the mishkan was collected during the days before Sukkot (though the tabernacle itself was not actually assembled until Nissan 1 (Exodus 40:2)). Later King Solomon is said to have dedicated the Temple during the festival of Sukkot (1 Kings 8:2,65).

Since it follows the Days of Awe and Repentance, Sukkot represents the time of restored fellowship with the LORD. In fact, the mishkan (and later, the temple) represents God's Presence living among His redeemed people (Exodus 29:44-45).

Just so, the modern observance of Sukkot allows just a few days -- from the time Yom Kippur ends on Tishri 11 to Tishri 15 -- to begin assembling and decorating the sukkah for the festivities. Sukkot represents a time of renewed fellowship with God, remembering His sheltering provision and care for us.

The Season of our Joy - Zeman Simchateinu

Sukkot is the conclusion of the Jewish Fall Holidays and the last of the three *Shelosh Regalim* [the three annual pilgrimage festivals: *Pesach*, *Shavu'ot*, and *Sukkot* (Deuteronomy 16:16)]. It is interesting to compare the use of words relating to *simchah* [joy] in the description of these three festivals. Regarding *Pesach*, the word *simchah* does not appear at all (Deuteronomy 17:1-8); regarding *Shavu'ot*, it appears only once (Deuteronomy 17:11); but, regarding *Sukkot*, *simchah* appears several times:

You shall keep the Feast of Sukkot seven days, when you have gathered in the produce... You shall *rejoice* in your feast... because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether *joyful*. (Deuteronomy 16:13-15)

In fact, in ancient Israel, the joy of Sukkot was so great that it became known simply as "The Feast."

From an agricultural perspective in ancient Israel, *Pesach* [Passover] corresponded to the planting season, *Shavu'ot* [Pentecost] corresponded to the grain harvest, and *Sukkot* corresponded to the fruit harvest. When you planted your crops in Spring, you do not yet rejoice because you were uncertain about how the harvest will turn out. And when you harvested your grain at the start of summer, you might have rejoiced that you now had bread in hand, but you would still be uncertain about the success of your fruit crops. Total joy would come after you had harvested all of your crops in the Fall, and thereby received sustenance and provision for the coming year from the LORD. For this reason, *Sukkot* is sometimes referred to as *Chag Ha-asif*, or the Feast of Ingathering.



From a spiritual perspective, Sukkot corresponds to the joy of knowing your sins were forgiven (during Yom Kippur), and also recalls God's miraculous provision and care after the deliverance from bondage in Egypt (Leviticus 23:43). Prophetically, Sukkot anticipates the coming kingdom of the Mashiach Yeshua wherein all the nations shall come up to Jerusalem to worship the LORD during the festival (see Zechariah 14:16). Today Sukkot is a time to remember God's Sheltering Presence and Provision for us for the start of the New Year.

Sukkot in the Tanakh

In Biblical times, Sukkot was considered the most important of all the holidays, referred to simply as "the Festival" (1 Kings 12:32). It was a time of many sacrifices (Numbers 29) and a time when (on Sabbatical years) the Torah would be read aloud to the people (Deuteronomy 31:10-13).

The Torah commands three things regarding the festival of Sukkot:

1. To live in a sukkah (Leviticus 23:42)
2. To gather the "four species" (Leviticus 23:40)
3. To rejoice before the LORD (Deuteronomy 16:13-14; Leviticus 23:40)

Building a Sukkah

To build a sukkah, you first must select a site that has nothing hanging above it -- i.e. a roof or a tree. The sukkah floor space must be large enough to accommodate a person who can sit with a small table. A "kosher" sukkah needs at least two walls and a small part of a third wall. Walls can be of any material, as long as they are sturdy enough to withstand a normal wind (note: You can use the sides of a building for a wall).

The roof of the sukkah (called a *sikhakh*, from the same root as the word *sukkah*) must be covered with material that grows from the ground -- such as branches or leaves. The *sikhakh* must be sufficiently covered so that it gives more shade than sun during the daytime but should allow stars to be visible through the roof at night.



Since the Sukkah will be your "home" for the next seven days, it is customary to decorate it with hanging fruits, flowers, popcorn wreaths, ornaments, etc., from the ceiling, and tape posters of Jewish themes on the walls. Some people even string Christmas tree lights on the outside of their sukkah!



Sukkah Blessings

On the first night of Sukkot, it is considered a mitzvah to light two candles, recite Shehecheyanu, and eat a meal inside the sukkah.

First we light the two holiday candles in the sukkah. Note that unlike Shabbat, we first say the blessing and then light the candles:

| | | | | | | | |
|----------|--------|--------|------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------|---------------|
| בְּרוּךְ | אַתָּה | יְי | אֱלֹהֵינוּ | מֶלֶךְ | הָעוֹלָם, | אֲשֶׁר | קִדְּשָׁנוּ |
| barukh | at-tah | Adonai | elo-hei-nu | me-lekh | ha'o-lam | 'a-sher | kid-de-sha-nu |
| Blessed | You | LORD | our God | King of the universe | King of the universe | who | sanctifies us |

| | | | | | | |
|------------------|---------------|------------|-------|------|-------------|-------|
| בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, | וְצִוָּנוּ | לְהַדְלִיק | נֵר | שֶׁל | יוֹם | טוֹב. |
| be-mits-votav | ve-tsi-va-nu | le-had-lik | ner | shel | yom | tov |
| with his mitzvot | and commanded | to kindle | light | of | the holiday | |
| | us | | | | | |

barukh attah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, asher kideshanu bemitzvotav ve-tsivanu lehadlik ner shel yom tov.

On the first night of Sukkot (only), we add the following blessing:

| | | | | | |
|----------|--------|--------|------------|---------|------------------|
| בְּרוּךְ | אַתָּה | יְי | אֱלֹהֵינוּ | מֶלֶךְ | הָעוֹלָם, |
| barukh | at-tah | Adonai | elo-hei-nu | me-lekh | ha'o-lam |
| Blessed | You, | Lord | our God, | King | of the universe, |

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe,”

| | | | | |
|------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------|----------------|
| שֶׁחַיָּנוּ | וְקִיָּמָנוּ | וְהִנֵּיָנוּ | לְזִמְן | הַזֶּה. |
| she-he-che-ya-nu | ve-ki-ye-ma-nu | ve-hi-gi-a-nu | laz-ze-man | haz-zeh |
| and bringing us | to this time. | and taking care | of us, | for keeping us |
| | | | | alive, |

Barukh attah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha'olam, she-hecheyanu vekiyemanu vehigianu lazman hazeh.



Before eating the holiday meal in the sukkah, we recite *kiddush* and then say the blessing over the sukkah:

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------|----------|----------------------|---------|-------------|--------|--------|----------|
| כִּדְּשָׁנוּ | אֲשֶׁר | הָעוֹלָם, | מֶלֶךְ | אֱלֹהֵינוּ | יְי | אַתָּה | בָּרוּךְ |
| kid-de-sha-nu | 'a-sheer | ha-'o-lam | me-lekh | e-lo-hei-nu | Adonai | at-tah | ba-rukh |
| sanctifies us | who | King of the universe | | our God | LORD | You | Blessed |



| | | | |
|------------------|--------------|----------|---------------|
| בַּמִּצְוֹתָיו, | וְצִוָּנוּ | לֵישֵׁב | בַּסּוּכָה. |
| be-mits-vo-tav | ve-tsi-va-nu | le-sheiv | bas-suk-kah |
| with his mitzvot | and | to dwell | in the sukkah |
| | commanded | | |
| | us | | |

Barukh attah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, asher kideshanu bemitzvotav ve-tsivanu lesheiv baSukkah.

We then will say the blessing over the bread and partake of our meal. Traditional foods include stuffed cabbage and kreplach containing fruit or fall harvest vegetables; dishes made with honey and pastries.

There is also a custom of inviting “imaginary guests” (*ushpizin*) to join us in the sukkah for our meals. On the first night we invite Abraham and for each subsequent night we invite Issac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and King David.

The Four Species

The Four Species, or *arba minim*, are four types of organic products the LORD commanded to be used (in Leviticus 23:40) for the celebration of Sukkot. Traditionally these are understood to be:

1. Etrog (ET-rog) – A lemon-like, citrus fruit referred to as *pri etz hadar* [“the product of goodly trees”]
2. Branches of palm trees – *kapot temarim*
3. Myrtle – *Haddas* [“Boughs of leafy trees”]
4. Willows of the brook – *aravot*



A young girl holds the lulav and etrog

The *lulav* is a bouquet made of the palm branches, myrtle and willow branches that are bound together and waved / shaken in praise to the LORD.



According to the principle of *hiddur mitzvah* [beautifying the commandment], most Jews will seek excellent specimens for their “four species.” At any rate, the lulav and etrog should be kept in good condition throughout the festival, since they are needed everyday (except on the Shabbat that occurs during Sukkot) to perform various ceremonies.

Waving the Lulav

On Sukkot, you will first bind all the branches together -- two willows on the left, one palm branch in the center, and three myrtles on the right.

Next, hold the bundle in your right hand and then lift them together with the Etrog (pointing downward) in your left hand.

Recite the following blessing:

| | | | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|--------|----------------------|---------|-------------|--------|-------------|--------|
| בְּרוּךְ | אַתָּה | יְי | אֱלֹהֵינוּ | מֶלֶךְ | הָעוֹלָם, | אֲשֶׁר | קִדְּשָׁנוּ | |
| kid-de | sha-nu | 'a-she | ha-'o-lam | me-lekh | e-lo-hei-nu | Adonai | at-tah | ba-ruk |
| sanctifies | us | who | King of the universe | our God | LORD | You | Blessed | |



| | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|-----------|--------------|------------------|
| בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, | וְצִוָּנוּ | עַל | נְשִׁילָת | לְלֻב. |
| lu-lav | ne-tilat | 'al | ve-tsi-va-nu | be-mits-vo-tav |
| lulav | raising up the | regarding | and | with his mitzvot |
| | | | commanded | us |

Barukh attah Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha'olam, asher kid'shanu bi'mitzvotav, vi'tzivanu al netilat lulav.

Now, turn the etrog right-side up, put both hands side-by-side, and then shake the lulav three times in each direction: front, right, back, left, up and down. These six directions indicate the surrounding presence of God.

Note:

If this is the first time you do this for Sukkot, recite the Shehechyanu blessing:



בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,

ha'olam me-lekh eloheinu Adonai atah barukh

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe,”

שֶׁהַחַיֵּינוּ וְקִיָּמָנוּ וְהִנֵּי־עָנּוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.

haz-zeh laz-zeman ve-hi-gi-anu ve-ki-ye-ma-nu she-he-che-ya-nu

“for keeping us alive, taking care of us, and bringing us to this time.”

*Barukh attah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha'olam,
she-hecheyanu vekiyemanu vehigianu lazman hazeh.*

Sukkot Services

The lulav is shaken during the *Hallel* (praise psalms sung right after the Amidah in the morning service) as well as during the Hoshanah - a hymn that begins with *Hosha' na* [save us] that is sung during the service. Normally the Torah is taken from the Ark and set on the bema and the congregation circles it in a processional (called *hakafot*) while shaking their *lulavot* and carrying their *etrogim*.



When one of the intermediate days of Sukkot (*Chol Ha-Mo'edim*) falls on the Shabbat, the book of *Kohelet* (Ecclesiastes) is read before the reading of the Torah.

The Water Libation Ceremony

During the seven days of Sukkot a sacrificial pouring out of water (called a “water libation”) was performed at the Temple (Sukkah 51 a-b). The water was drawn by the High Priest from the pool of *Shiloach* (Siloam) and carried back to in the courtyard of the outer Temple in a golden pitcher. When the High priest would pour out the water, the people would wave their *lulavot* and sing:

אָנָּה יְהוָה הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא אָנָּה יְהוָה הַצְלִיחָה נָּא

“Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity.”



Psalm 118 was viewed as a Messianic Psalm -- and when Yeshua the Mashiach indeed appeared during His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:8-9; Luke 19:38; John 12:13), He was initially greeted with shouts of "Hosanna!" and waving lulav as the Messiah King come to deliver the people of Israel (see also Revelation 7:9-10).

The Temple Light Show

After the water ceremony, during the evening, special festivities called *Simchat Bet HaShoevah* [happiness of the house of the water-drawing] occurred. During this time the four towering menorahs were lit up and the priests would put on a "light show," performing torch dances while the Levites sang and played music. These shows would occur every night of Sukkot, all through the night. These festivities were apparently so spectacular that the Jewish sages have said, "He who has not seen the rejoicing at the Simchat Bet Hasheavah, has never seen rejoicing in his life" (Sukkot 5:1).

It was also during this time of Sukkot that Yeshua the Mashiach revealed Himself to be the Light of the world (John 8:12, 7:2, 37). Moreover, Yeshua used the very water from the pool of Shiloach (Siloam) to heal the man born blind, enabling him to see the Light of the world.

Future Fulfillment

The festival of Sukkot has a prophetic dimension awaiting fulfillment. As the Day of Ingathering of the harvest, Sukkot prefigures the gathering together of the Jewish people in the days of the Messiah's reign on earth (Isaiah 27:12-13; Jeremiah 23:7-8). Indeed all of the nations of the earth that survived the Great Tribulation will come together to worship the LORD in Jerusalem during the Feast of Sukkot (Zechariah 14:16-17).

Sukkot also foreshadows the LORD's sheltering Presence over Israel in the millennial kingdom. No longer will Israel be subject to the oppression of the *goyim* (nations), but God Himself will place His sanctuary in her midst (Ezekiel 37:26-28).

Yeshua the Mashiach did indeed come to "sukkah" (or "tabernacle") with us (see John 1:14) in order to purge our sins from us and to redeem us to Himself. Yes, by the eye of faith we see the revelation of the True Shechinah of the LORD God Almighty in the Person of Yeshua our beloved Mashiach. Nevertheless, we still eagerly await His return to establish His Kingdom and set up His everlasting Sukkah with us -- so that that we may know, love, and abide with the Him forever!

Maran ata, LORD Yeshua.