

SUKKOS – SEASON OF JOY



Sukkos is one of the **Shalosh Regalim**, the Three Pilgrimage Festivals, that also include Passover and Shavuos. The Three Festivals have a dual theme:

- **Agricultural:** Passover is the Festival of the Ripening Grain; Shavuos is the Festival of the Harvest; and Sukkos is the **Festival of Gathering**, when the grain is collected from the fields where it has dried all summer long. Sukkos thus marks the end of the agricultural year – a season of fulfillment and satisfaction, and a time to pray for rain for the coming year.
- **Historical:** Passover celebrates the Exodus from Egypt; Shavuos recalls the Giving of the Torah seven weeks later; and Sukkos commemorates the Jews' travels through the Great Desert, sheltered by Divine protection.

The Days of Sukkos

Sukkos is celebrated for eight days in the Land of Israel; outside of Israel, it is celebrated for nine days (Biblical holidays are observed for an extra day in the Diaspora).

The Torah calls the first day and the eighth day “holy” days; this means they are rest days, like the Sabbath, albeit with slightly fewer restrictions. Outside of Israel, holy days are observed on the first two days and the last two days (day eight and nine). The intermediate days of Sukkos are called Chol HaMoed, and some kinds of work are permitted.

THE SUKKAH:

The Sukkah commemorates the temporary **huts** – Sukkos – that the Jews used in the desert, and the **Clouds of Glory** that surrounded them above, below and on all four sides. Like our ancestors, we, too, leave our comfortable homes to shelter in the Sukkah, while all around us people are shoring up their houses and hunkering down for the winter. Living for a whole week in the Sukkah, we show that under G-d's protection, we are comfortable and have nothing to fear.

The Sukkah is defined by its roof, or S'chach, made of discarded plant material – something that grows from the ground but is neither food nor a usable item. Branches and leaves are acceptable (bamboo is a popular choice), but fruit, vegetables or wooden implements are not. A Sukkah must have at least three walls.

The Sukkah is a beloved Mitzvah, and is considered a sacred space, its sanctity akin to that of a synagogue. It is customary to beautify the Sukkah with all manner of festive decorations.



ARBA MINIM – THE FOUR SPECIES:

On Sukkos, the Torah commands us to perform a Mitzvah with the products of four types of trees:

- Lulav – the unopened frond of a date palm (represents the spine)



- Esrog – the citron, a fruit akin to a lemon with a very thick, bumpy skin (represents the heart)



- Aravos – two willow branches (represents the lips)



- Hadassim – three myrtle branches (represents the eyes)



To perform the Mitzvah, the Esrog is held in the right hand, while the Lulav, Hadassim and Aravos are held together in the right, usually in a special holder woven of palm leaves. After reciting a blessing on the Mitzvah, we wave the Four Species in all four directions, upwards and downwards.



On every day of Sukkos except Sabbath, we circle the synagogue sanctuary bearing the Four Species, while reciting special prayers with the refrain “**Hosha-Na**,” a plea for salvation. On the seventh day of Sukkos, the synagogue is circled seven times. This day is called **Hoshana Rabbah** – the “Great Hoshana” – and is considered a final Day of Judgment, the last echo of Rosh Hoshana and Yom Kippur. The Hoshana Rabbah service includes special prayers for rain and agricultural bounty, while also

incorporating mystical themes and references to the Messianic Redemption. The service concludes with a bundle of five willow branches, called Hoshanos, which are held in the hand and then beaten upon the ground.

SHEMINI ATZERES – THE EIGHTH DAY



Actually a separate holiday, Shemini Atzeres simply means Eighth Day Assembly. Our Sages give the metaphor of a king whose beloved children are departing; the king begs his children to stay for one more day, expressing his yearning for their closeness: “It is hard for Me when you leave!”

Outside of Israel, Shemini Atzeres is observed on both the Eighth and Ninth days, in keeping with the standard practice of adding an extra day in places distant from Jerusalem.



The Shemini Atzeres service includes Tefillas Geshem, a special public prayer for rain – which never falls in Israel during the summer, but is critical for the growth of crops during the winter. From now on, the phrase “Mashiv haruach umorid hageshem” – “Who makes the wind blow and the rain fall” – is added to the second blessing of the daily Shemone Esreh prayer.

SIMCHAS TORAH:



This joyous occasion marks the completion of the entire Torah during the weekly synagogue readings. Though Simchas Torah is not a Biblical observance – there were periods in history when the Torah was not completed annually – it is now a universal custom, observed for many centuries on Shemini Atzeres (the eighth day in Israel, and the ninth day outside of Israel).

Just as we circled the synagogue on Sukkos with the Four Species, we circle it on Simchas Torah seven times carrying the Torah scrolls. These circles – called Hakafof – are a time for joyous dancing and celebration. On Simchas Torah, everyone in the synagogue is called up to make a blessing on the Torah.



שמחת תורה