

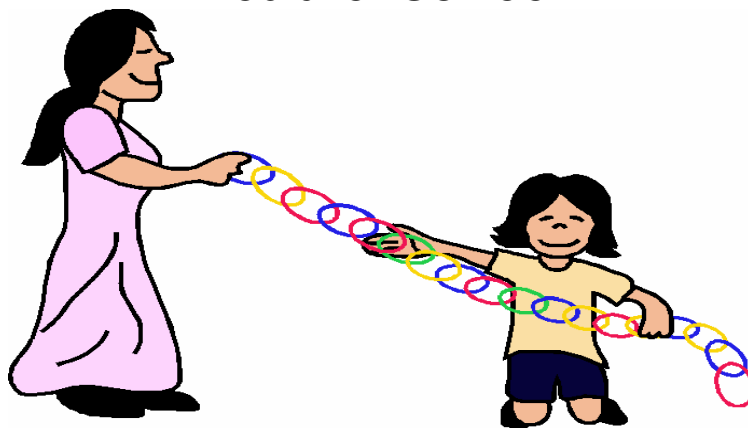


The Richmond Jewish Day School

# A Family Guide for Sukkot and Simchat Torah



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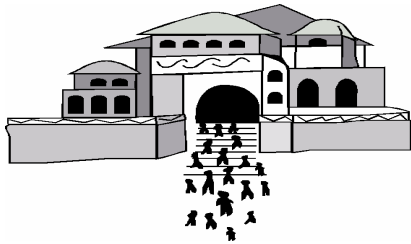


# Sukkot

# סוכות

The Festival of *Sukkot* begins on *Tishri* 15, the fifth day after *Yom Kippur*. It is quite a drastic transition, from one of the most solemn holidays in our year to one of the most joyous. *Sukkot* is so unreservedly joyful that it is commonly referred to in Jewish prayer and literature as *Z'man Simchateinu* זמן סימחתנו, the Season of our Rejoicing.

*Sukkot* is the last of the *Shalosh R'galim* (three pilgrimage festivals). Like *Passover* and *Shavuot*, *Sukkot* has a dual significance: historical and agricultural. Historically, *Sukkot* commemorates the forty-year period during which the children of Israel were wandering in the desert, living in temporary shelters.



*You shall celebrate the festival of ingathering, at the end of the year, when you gather in your labors out of the field. (Exodus 23:16)*

Agriculturally, *Sukkot* is a harvest festival and is sometimes referred to as *Chag Ha-Asif* חג האסף, the Festival of Ingathering.

*After the harvest from your threshing floor and your vineyards, you shall celebrate the Feast of Booths for seven days. (Deuteronomy 16:13)*

The word "Sukkot" means "booths," and refers to the temporary dwellings that we are commanded to live in during this holiday in memory of the period of wandering.



*You shall live in booths seven days in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.*  
(Leviticus 23:42-43)

*Sukkot* lasts for seven days. The two days following the festival, *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah*, are separate holidays but are related to *Sukkot*. No work is permitted on the first and second days of the holiday. Work is permitted on the remaining days. These intermediate days on which work is permitted are referred to as *Chol Ha-Mo'ed*.

## Building a Sukkah

סוכה

*You will dwell in booths for seven days; all natives of Israel shall dwell in booths.* -Leviticus 23:42

In honor of the holiday's historical significance, we are commanded to dwell in temporary shelters, as our ancestors did in the wilderness. The temporary shelter is referred to as a *sukkah*.

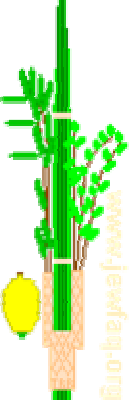
A *sukkah* must have at least two and a half walls covered with a material that will not blow away in the wind. A *sukkah* may be any size, so long as it is large enough for you to fulfill the commandment of dwelling in it. The roof of the *sukkah* must be made of material referred to as *sekhakh* (literally, covering). *Sekhakh* must be placed sparsely enough that rain can get in, and preferably sparsely enough that the stars can be seen.



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ

לֵישֵׁב בְּסֻכָּה



## Arba Minim

## אַרְבַּע מִינִים

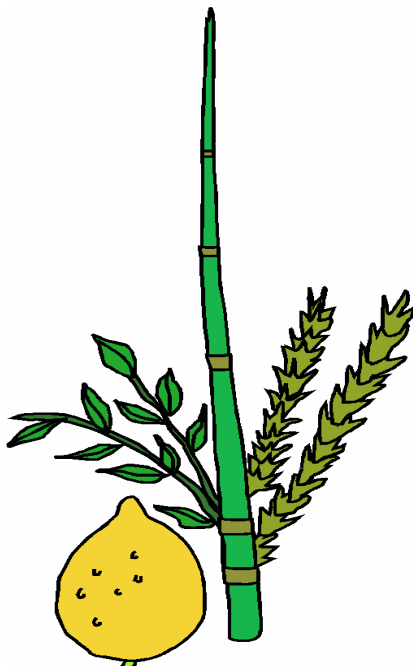
On the first day, you will take for yourselves a fruit of a beautiful tree, palm branches, twigs of a braided tree and brook willows, and you will rejoice before the L-RD your G-d for seven days. -Leviticus 23:40

Another observance during *Sukkot* involves what are known as the Four Species (*arba minim* in Hebrew). We are commanded to take these four plants and use them to "rejoice before the L-rd." The four species are an *etrog* (a citrus fruit similar to a lemon; in English it is called a citron), a palm branch (in Hebrew, *lulav*), two willow branches (*aravot*) and three myrtle branches (*hadassim*). The six branches are bound together and referred to collectively as the *lulav*, because the palm branch is by far the largest part. The *etrog* is held separately. With these four species in hand, one recites a blessing and waves the species in all six directions (east, south, west, north, up and down), symbolizing the fact that G-d is everywhere.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

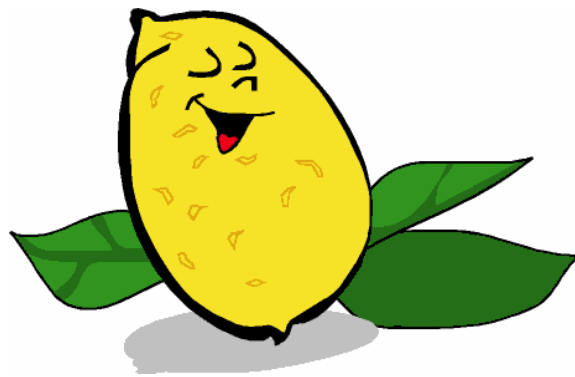
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ

עַל נְטִילַת לִילָב (אֶמֶן)



The four species are also held and waved during the *Hallel* prayer in services, and are held during processions around the bimah, called *hakafot* each day during the holiday. These processions commemorate similar processions around the altar of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. This part of the service is known as *Hoshanot*, because while the procession is made, we recite a prayer with the refrain, "*Hosha na!*" (please save us!). On the seventh day of *Sukkot*, seven circuits are made. For this reason, the seventh day of *Sukkot* is known as *Hoshanah Rabbah*. After the circuits on

*Hoshanah Rabbah*, we beat the willow branches against the floor five times, shaking loose some or all of the remaining leaves. A number of explanations are offered for this unusual beating practice, but the primary reason seems to be agricultural: the rainy season in Israel begins in the fall, and the leaves falling from the willow branch symbolize our desire for beneficial rainfall. The following day (Shemini Atzeret), we begin adding a line about rain to the thrice-daily *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer.



## **Shemini Atzeret**

## **שְׁמִינִי אֶצְרֵת**

The final day of *Sukkot*, called *Shemini Atzeret*, was reserved for a special set of sacrifices for the benefit of Israel and for a special prayer for rainfall. Not completely understood, *Shemini*, meaning eight, and *Atzeret*, meaning solemn assembly; referred to an extra set of rituals performed at the close of the holiday.



## Simchat Torah

## שמחת תורה

*Tishri 22*, the day after the seventh day of *Sukkot*, is the holiday *Shemini Atzeret*. In Israel, *Shemini Atzeret* is also the holiday of *Simchat Torah*. Outside of Israel, where extra days of holidays are held, only the second day of *Shemini Atzeret* is *Simchat Torah*: *Shemini Atzeret* is Tishri 22 and 23, while *Simchat Torah* is Tishri 23.

*Simchat Torah* means "Rejoicing in the Torah." This holiday marks the completion of the annual cycle of weekly Torah readings. Each week in synagogue we read a few chapters from the Torah, starting with Genesis Ch. 1 and working our way around to Deuteronomy 34. On *Simchat Torah*, we read the last Torah portion, and then proceed immediately to the first chapter of Genesis, reminding us that the Torah is a circle, and never ends.

This completion of the Torah readings is a time of great celebration. There are processions around the synagogue carrying Torahs. As many people as possible are given the honor of carrying a Torah scroll in these processions. We celebrate our love of Torah with lots of joyful singing and dancing.

