

Fun Facts

 The Hebrew word Sukkah (סכּה) teaches the valid arrangements available for the Sukkah's walls through the very shape of its letters! It can be four walled (ס, *samekh*), three walled (כּ, *khaf*), or two and a partial wall (ה, *hey*).  

 While there are minimum and maximum dimensions for all aspects of a Sukkah's construction, one dimension is uniquely unrestricted in its maximum, the square footage of the Sukkah's floor plan. The Rabbis (Talmud Bavli Sukkah 27b) teach that a Sukkah can be built large enough to accommodate all of Israel in a single Sukkah! As such, the Sukkah itself becomes yet another symbol of the Jewish unity we should constantly strive for.

 The origin of the Mechitza (the partition between genders found in Orthodox synagogues) traces its roots to the special balconies that were erected for women to observe the Simchat Beit Hashoeiva festivities (see 'How We Celebrate') held in the Temple.

!חג שמח Chag Sameach! (Have a Joyous Festival!)

All about **Sukkot** (including Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah)

A joyous celebration of gratitude

Night of Day of
Sep 25 – Oct 4 / Tishrei 15–23



*V'Hayita Ach Sameach –
And you shall be entirely happy!*



The Backstory

Through its interwoven themes and rituals, Sukkot contains elements which serve as both the capstone of the High Holiday period and also the conclusion of the *Shalosh Regalim*, the three pilgrimage festivals, tied in with the agricultural seasons and the formative milestones in our national development.

While Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the epicenter of the period of G-d's personal judgement and our efforts at *teshuva*, repentance, the mishna (Rosh Hashanah 1:2) understands that Sukkot is when the world is judged regarding rainfall - the key element of survival and prosperity in an agricultural society. Throughout the holiday, 70 sacrifices were brought in the Temple on behalf of the 70 nations (the traditional number used to represent all nations) of the world. Indeed, part of the joy of Sukkot is from the atonement achieved for the entire world during this time period. The culmination of this process occurs on Hoshanah Rabbah (the 7th day of Sukkot) when the verdict which was decided on Rosh Hashanah and sealed on Yom Kippur is ultimately 'delivered' for implementation.

As part of the *Shalosh Regalim*, Sukkot joins Passover and Shavuot as a holiday where during Temple times Jews would make pilgrimages to Jerusalem. These annual pilgrimages demonstrated complete trust in G-d's promise that our homes would remain safe while all men of fighting age and strength left the borders of Israel vulnerable and traveled to the center of the country to appear before G-d at the Temple (Exodus 34:24). Sukkot, in particular, emphasizes this trust through its celebratory gratitude at a completed harvest (it's even called

Zeman Simchateinu, the time of our joy) and an exit from the safety of our houses to the vulnerability of Sukkot (temporary dwellings or booths) - reminiscent of the 40 years spent wandering in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt where we were constantly sheltered through G-d's overt protection (Leviticus 23:43).

Shmini Atzeret, the 8th and final biblical day of Sukkot, is both a part of Sukkot, but also a *Regel Bifnei Atzmo*, a festival unto itself (Talmud Bavli Sukkah 48a). It gets its own name in our prayers, but shares the common theme of joy. The primary rituals of Sukkot (the four species and the Sukkah) are discontinued, and instead of the sacrifice on behalf of the rest of the nations of the world, the offering in the Temple was particular to the Jewish people (Talmud Bavli Sukkah 55b). The metaphor chosen by the Rabbis to capture the essence of the day is one of a king who throws a weeklong party for his entire kingdom, but who asks his most beloved to stay one additional day for a more personal celebration. Today, Simchat Torah, the celebration marking the completion of our annual Torah reading cycle, has been attached to Shmini Atzeret - our way of sharing with the King of Kings that we, too, are grateful for our unique status as those chosen to be G-d's covenantal people.

How We Celebrate

The Sukkah: A temporary "home" where all meals are eaten and that is constructed specifically for the holiday. It must have at least two complete and one partial wall capable of withstanding a typical breeze, and an unobstructed roof made of detached vegetation like branches and leaves (called *Schach*) which provides more shade than sun during the day while allowing the stars to remain visible at night.

The Four Species: Throughout Sukkot, except on Shabbat, a *Lulav* (palm branch) is bound up with three *Hadasim* (myrtle branches) and two *Aravot* (willow branches) and held together with an *Etrog* (a citron) for a blessing and choreographed waving towards each of the 6 directions (forward, right, backwards, left, up and down). The gathering together of these diverse species with their divergent qualities of taste and smell is said to represent the necessary unity of our diverse Jewish community.



Ecclesiastes: This book of the Hebrew Bible is read on Shabbat during Sukkot.

Hallel and Hoshanot: These additional words of praise and requests for salvation are recited during the morning prayers throughout Sukkot accompanied by the four species.

Simchat Beit Hashoeiva: (Rejoicing of the water-drawing house) During Temple times a huge party was held surrounding the joy of the day's water drawing ceremony. Each night crowds of spectators would come to the Temple courtyard to watch the leaders of the community dance, play music, and engage in spectacle (like torch juggling!). Today, people gather in Sukkot during the intermediate days of the holiday to similarly revel with music, dancing, and refreshments, with parties lasting late into the night.

Shmini Atzeret: The Sukkah and Four Species are no longer our focus. *Tefilat Geshem*, the prayer for rain, is recited on Shmini Atzeret requesting that rain and sustenance be sufficient and timed in a way that is conducive to our prosperity. *Yizkor*, the prayer which remembers our departed relatives is also recited.

Simchat Torah celebration: The last day of the holiday celebrates the completion of the annual Torah reading cycle. In the synagogue, this is marked through singing and dancing with the community's Torah scrolls. In Israel (and Reform communities), the special prayers of Shmini Atzeret and celebrations of Simchat Torah are fused into one day.