



SUKKOT

IN 60 MINUTES (OR LESS)

BY RABBI ELAZAR MEISELS

Sukkot in the Torah

דָּבַר אֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בְּחַמְשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי הַזֶּה חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת שִׁבְעַת יָמִים לִידְוָד: בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ כָּל מְלֹאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תִּקְרְבוּ אִשָּׁה לִידְוָד בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אִשָּׁה לִידְוָד עֲצֻרַת הוּא כָּל מְלֹאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: אֵלֶּה מוֹעֲדֵי יְדְוָד אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ לְהִקְרִיב אִשָּׁה לִידְוָד עֲלֶה וּמְנַחָה זָבַח וּנְסֻכִים דָּבַר יוֹם בַּיּוֹם: מְלֻבָּד שְׁבַתַּת יְדְוָד וּמְלֻבָּד מִתְּנוּתֵיכֶם וּמְלֻבָּד כָּל נְדָרֵיכֶם וּמְלֻבָּד כָּל נְדָבָתֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר תִּתְּנוּ לִידְוָד: אַךְ בְּחַמְשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאַסְפְּכֶם אֶת תְּבוּאוֹת הָאָרֶץ תַּחֲלוּ אֶת חַג יְדְוָד שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן שְׁבַתוֹן וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי שְׁבַתוֹן: וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרִי עֵץ הַדֶּרֶךְ כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים וְעֵנָף עֵץ עֲבֹת וְעֵרְבִי נָחַל וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי יְדְוָד אֶל-לִקְיֶיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים: וְחַגְגְתֶּם אֹתוֹ חַג לִידְוָד שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה חֶקֶת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי תַחֲלוּ אֹתוֹ: בְּסֻכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל הָאֲזֻכָּח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יָשְׁבוּ בְּסֻכּוֹת: לִמְעַן יִדְעוּ דֹרֹתֵיכֶם כִּי בְּסֻכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם אֲנִי יְדְוָד אֶל-לִקְיֶיכֶם:

ויקרא פרק כג-לג

And G-d spoke to Moses, telling him to speak to the Israelites, saying: The 15th of this seventh month shall be the festival of Sukkot to G-d, lasting seven days. The first day shall be a sacred holiday when you may not do any service work. For seven days then, you shall present a fire-offering to G-d. The eighth day is a sacred holiday to you when you shall bring a fire-offering to God. It is a day of convocation when you may do no service work.

The above are God's special times which you must keep as sacred holidays. Times when you must present to G-d a burnt-offering, a meal-offering, a sacrifice and libations, each depending on the particular day. [This, in addition to] G-d's Sabbath sacrificial offerings, the gifts and the specific and general pledges that you offer to G-d. On the 15th of the seventh month, when you harvest the land's grain, you shall celebrate a festival to G-d for seven days. The first day shall be a day of rest, and the eighth day shall be a day of rest. On the first day, you must take for yourself a fruit of the citron tree, an unopened palm frond, myrtle branches, and willows of the brook. You

"For seven days you shall dwell in Sukkot... This is so that future generations will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt."

Rabbi Eliezer holds that these booths were the Clouds of Glory which encircled and protected us throughout our stay in the desert. Rabbi Akiva explains that the verse refers to the actual tents in which we lived while sojourning the desert. *Talmud, Tractate Sukkah 11b*

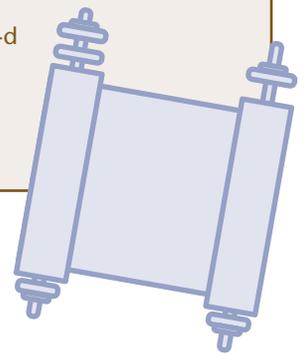
What is the significance of the tents in the desert that they deserve such a serious commemoration? The Sukkah reminds us of the great faith of the Jewish people, who followed G-d's command, traveling into the uninhabitable desert and living in makeshift booths. They trusted wholeheartedly that He would care for their every need in the wilderness.

Aruch HaShulchan

From the Chassidic Masters

Sukkot is also known as the Season of our Rejoicing, because of the special obligation to rejoice during this time. True happiness derives from being satisfied with one's lot, regardless of how materially wealthy one is. When we leave our comfortable homes and sit in the impermanent Sukkot, we remind ourselves that physical comforts cannot provide true happiness. We thus ingrain in our hearts and minds the importance of being satisfied with whatever G-d grants us.

Olelos Ephraim

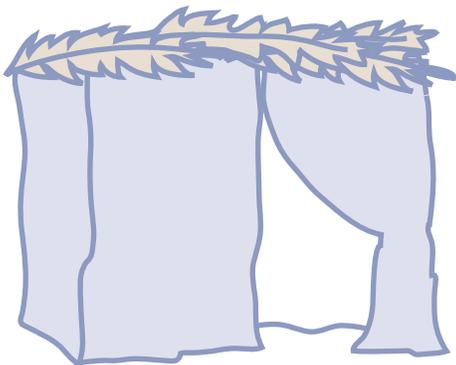


It is told that someone once asked the Gaon of Vilna which mitzvah he considers to be the most difficult of all the 613 mitzvot. The Gaon did not immediately respond. After contemplating the matter, he answered that the mitzvah to rejoice for the entire eight days of Sukkot is the most difficult to fulfill. After all, he explained, the mitzvah obligates us to lay aside all our worries and fears and embrace a positive and joyous state of mind for eight complete days! While not impossible, this is surely a difficult feat to accomplish.

From the Mystics

Peleh Yoetz quotes Ariza"l, who says that one must make a great effort to rejoice during this holiday; if he succeeds in this, he is assured of having a similarly joyous and positive year.

While fulfilling the mitzvah to be joyous, one should not close his door and celebrate with only his family members, for that is not joy that emanates from a mitzvah, but an act that borders on self-interest. Rather, true joy is achieved when one invites needy people into his home and enables them to partake of the special holiday feeling.
Kad HaKemach



shall rejoice before G-d for seven days. During these seven days each year, you shall celebrate to G-d. It is an eternal law for all generations that you celebrate [this festival] in the seventh month. For seven days you shall dwell in Sukkot. Everyone in Israel must live in such thatched huts. This is so that future generations will know that I had the Israelites live in huts when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your G-d.

Leviticus 23:33-43

חג הסוכות תעשה לך שבועת ימים באספן מגרונך ומיקרבך: ושמחת בחגך אתה ובנך ובתך ועבדך ואמתך והלוי והגר והיתום והאלמנה אשר בשעריך: שבועת ימים תחג לידוך אלקיך במקום אשר יבחר ידוך כי יברכך ידוך אלקיך בכל תבואתך ובכל מעשה ידוך והיית אד שמח:
דברים פרק טו:יג-טו

When you bring in the products of your threshing floor and wine press, you shall celebrate the festival of Sukkot for seven days. You shall rejoice on your festival along with your son and daughter, your male and female servants, the Levite, proselyte, orphan and widow from your cities. Celebrate to G-d your Lord for seven days in the place that G-d will choose, for G-d will then bless you in all your agricultural and other endeavors, so that you will be pure happiness.

Deuteronomy 16:13-15

Names of the Holiday

THE HOLIDAY HAS FOUR NAMES:

- 1. Sukkot** — Booths: Referring to the temporary booths in which we dwelled in the desert.
- 2. Chag HaAssif** — Festival of the Harvest: Referring to the fact that this holiday was celebrated at the conclusion of the harvest season.
- 3. Z'man Simchoteinu** — Season of our Rejoicing: Referring to the special obligation to rejoice during these festive days.
- 4. HaChag** — The Festival: With the close of the harvest season, this was the farmer's first occasion to relax and rejoice.

Unique Features of Sukkot

Sukkot is the only holiday that really encompasses two holidays: Seven days of Sukkot and one day of Shemini Atzeret [upon which we celebrate Simchat Torah].

Sukkot begins just five days after Yom Kippur.

Sukkot has the greatest number of unique mitzvot to fulfill on the holiday:

1. Lulav [palm frond]
2. Etrog [citron]
3. Aravah [willow]
4. Hadass [myrtle]
5. Water libations on the Altar
6. Holding the Aravah on Hoshanah Rabbah [the 7th day of Sukkot]
7. The obligation to rejoice

Building a Sukkah

While no special talents are required to construct a Sukkah, a working knowledge of the relevant laws is a must to ensure that the Torah's stringent requirements for a Sukkah are met. Here are the basics of which one must be aware before starting this project. Keep in mind that not only is sitting in the Sukkah a fulfillment of the mitzvah, but also everything involved in its construction is a mitzvah too.

SUITABLE SITES

1. Nothing should be hanging above the Sukkah [e.g. a roof or a tree].
2. The floor space of a Sukkah must be at least 27 inches by 27 inches [729 sq. inches or 5.06 sq. feet].
3. It should be constructed on land that is owned or leased by the Sukkah owner unless permission has been granted by the owners for this purpose.

WALL TO WALL

1. A valid Sukkah must consist of at least three walls. [In practice, this can be satisfied with two complete walls and a small segment of a third wall, which qualifies as a third wall.]
2. Walls can be of any material, so long as they are sturdy enough to withstand a normal wind.
3. One may incorporate walls of an existing structure into his Sukkah if desired. Some even use a thick hedge of bushes.
4. The walls should be at least 38 inches high (3.2 ft.), but not higher than 30 feet.

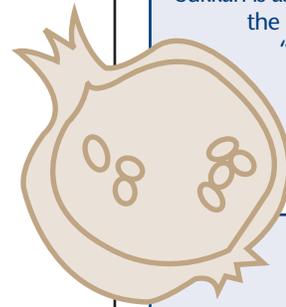
TOPPING IT OFF

The term used in the Talmud for roof material is s'chach, and it is actually this part of the Sukkah after which the entire edifice is named. The following three conditions must be met in order for s'chach to be "kosher":

The word Sukkah in Hebrew is spelled with the letters, samech, kof, hey. Each letter symbolizes another possible configuration for a kosher Sukkah. Samech [ס] is comprised of four lines in a box-like shape, which represents a Sukkah of four complete walls. Kof [כ] is comprised of three lines in the shape of a semi-circle and represents a Sukkah of three complete walls. Heh [ה] is comprised of two straight lines that form a right angle and a third partial line opposite the vertical line. These represent a Sukkah that has two complete walls and part of a third which is also acceptable.

Gaon of Vilna

One must treat the Sukkah as his "home" for the seven days of Sukkot. Thus, just as one decorates his home to enhance its appearance, it is customary to decorate the Sukkah as well. Some hang fruits and flowers from the walls and ceiling and affix posters with Jewish themes to the walls. Another reason brought for this custom is because the mitzvah of the Sukkah is associated with the mitzvah of the Four Species regarding which "beauty" is not merely an option, but a prerequisite, as it says, "And you shall take for yourselves a fruit of the beautiful tree."



From the Chassidic Masters

R' Simchah Bunim of Peshischa used to remark that the mitzvah of the Sukkah is the most precious of all, because one fulfills it with his entire body when he enters the Sukkah. The holy Rebbe of Lenč'neh commented that in truth, the mitzvah of Shabbat is even more precious, since one need not initiate anything; the Shabbat itself envelopes us with holiness when it enters on Friday evening. Moreover, everyone occasionally leaves the Sukkah for one reason or another, whereas Shabbat engulfs us constantly for the entire 24 hours.

Rammassaim Tzofim

From the Chassidic Masters

Normally, parents drape protective clothing over a newborn infant to shield him from extreme temperatures. On Yom Kippur, when our sins are atoned, we are comparable to newborn infants and therefore G-d drapes His protective shield over us in the form of the Sukkah.

Tzemach David

From the Chassidic Masters

The law states that an area of invalid s'chach that is four hands-breath or larger disqualifies the s'chach, whereas a gap in the s'chach requires only three hands-breath or larger to be considered invalid. This demonstrates that there is something even worse than committing a sin. One who merely sits around and does nothing is on a lower level than one who martial his energies for some purpose — any purpose, even a sinful one. To sit idle is unconscionable; it contradicts the very essence of human existence.

Rav Yechezkel of Kozmir

From The Mystics

According to the Mystics, when we sit in the Sukkah, we are never alone; the souls of the seven shepherds of Israel [Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aharon, Joseph, and David] all visit to partake in the Divine light of the earthly Sukkot. Collectively, these awe-inspiring guests are known as *Ushpizin* (the Aramaic word meaning "guests"). Many have a custom to recite a short invitation to these Ushpizin [each time or once each day] when they partake of a meal in the Sukkah.

Zohar

From the Chassidic Masters

The name Sukkah implies a protective covering. Zohar makes an analogy to Noah's Ark, which protected its occupants from the raging flood, just as a Sukkah protects us from all evil. According to the Talmud [Sanhedrin 108a], only those who were free of sin were allowed entry into the Ark. Similarly, Sukkot directly follows the cleansing experience of Yom Kippur, facilitating our entry into the Sukkah free of sin.

Shem Mi'Shmuel

There are only two mitzvot that are fulfilled with the entire body: the Sukkah and the mikvah. Just as the mikvah cleanses us of impurities, so too, the Sukkah helps us rid ourselves of attraction to impurity, as we abandon the physical comforts of our earthly home and choose instead to rely on the security of the Almighty's Presence.

1. It must be made of materials that grow from the ground. (Leather, metal, and stone do not satisfy this requirement as they don't grow or aren't from the ground.)
2. It must be detached from the ground. (A branch or vine which is still attached to the ground cannot serve as s'chach.)
3. It must not be susceptible to tumah [ritual impurity]. (Something that grew in the ground, but was fashioned into a utensil for any use whatsoever, is susceptible to tumah and thus disqualified.)

Some materials that meet this criteria are bamboo rods, unfinished wooden slats [not used for construction], and evergreen or palm branches. Another popular choice is the bamboo mats made specifically for the purpose of s'chach [and not for reclining as they are sometimes used in other cultures]. Assuming they feature a reliable seal of kashrut affirming their permissibility for use in a Sukkah, these are a convenient, although somewhat expensive option. The roof material may be added only after the requisite number of walls is in place, and the s'chach must be sufficiently thick, such that it provides more shade than sun during the daytime. Nevertheless, it should not be so thickly laid that one cannot see stars through it at night or that rain cannot fall through.

Sukkah Dwelling

The purpose of constructing the Sukkah is to use it as a dwelling, as the Torah writes, "*For seven days you shall dwell in Sukkot.*" Indeed, we are expected to eat our meals in the Sukkah, sleep in it [in climates that allow for this] and carry out our daily functions [with the exception of those that are disrespectful to the Sukkah].

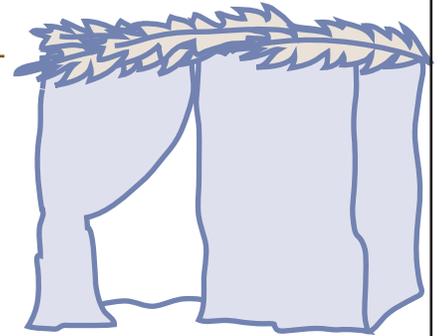
Many people move comfortable lounge chairs into their Sukkah and spend their leisure time there.

Although the Torah writes that all are obligated in the mitzvah, there are a few exceptions to the rule:

As is the general rule with mitzvot that are time-bound, women are exempt from the obligation to dwell in the Sukkah. Nevertheless, a woman who chooses to sit in a Sukkah may recite the blessing *leisheiv baSukkah*, since she does fulfill a mitzvah by doing so.

Minors [males under the age of 13, and females under the age of 12] are exempt from the mitzvah. Nevertheless, a father is obligated to train his son to dwell in the Sukkah from the age of five and above.

A sick person is exempt from the mitzvah, as are his attendants while they are taking care of his needs. This is true even if the illness is not life-threatening.



The Four Species

On Sukkot, along with the mitzvah of dwelling in the Sukkah comes the Scriptural obligation of “taking” the Four Species as instructed by the verse, “On the first day, you must take for yourself a fruit of the citron tree, an unopened palm frond, myrtle branches and willows of the brook.” Initially, the obligation was to take the Four Species all seven days only in the Holy Temple. Everywhere else, they were taken only on the first day. Following the destruction of the Holy Temple, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai ordained that they be taken all seven days everywhere as a means of commemorating the Temple. The Four Species are co-dependent, and if one of the four is missing, the mitzvah is not fulfilled. In total, seven individual items are required for the mitzvah:

- 1 **Lulav**
- 2 **Etrog**
- 2 **Aravot**
- 4 **Hadassim**

The Aravot and Hadassim are bound to the Lulav with rings made of leaves of the Lulav. The Hadassim are placed on the right, and the Aravot slightly lower, to the left. The Lulav is held with the right hand; the Etrog is held against the Lulav in the left hand.

A blessing is recited while one holds the Four Species in his hands. While reciting the blessing, the Etrog should be held with the “Pitem” [top of Etrog], facing downward. Following the recitation of the blessing, the Etrog is turned over, and the Four Species are shaken in the direction of North, South, East, West, up and down.

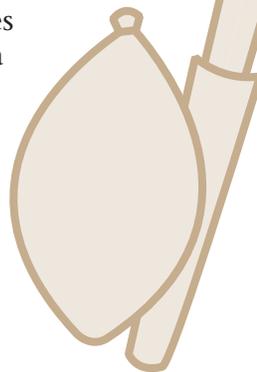
Lulav Facts

On the first day of Sukkot only, one may not simply borrow the Four Species in order to fulfill the mitzvah, but he must actually own them. Thus, if one does not have a personal set, he should request of another person his set as a gift. He may then return it to the original owner as a gift upon the conclusion of the waving. (This method works only with adults, not with children.)

When Sukkot occurs on Shabbat, the Four Species are not taken. This is because our sages enacted a prohibition against doing so on Shabbat, for fear that one would carry the Species in the public domain, thus desecrating the holy day.

The mitzvah of taking the Four Species may only be fulfilled during the daytime.

The mitzvah of Four Species is fulfilled only when the species are held in an upright position.



From the Chassidic Masters

The law is that a Sukkah does not require a mezuzah. The primary reason for this is because it is not a permanent dwelling and is thus exempt. Another reason cited is because the function of a Sukkah is to help a person protect and contain all the sparks of holiness that he acquired throughout the High Holy Days that preceded Sukkot. Thus, the protection normally provided by a mezuzah is not necessary during Sukkot. *Tiffere Shlomo of Radomsk*

The following blessing is recited over the Four Species:

Baruch atta Ado-nai Elo-heinu melech ha'olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al netilat Lulav.

Blessed are you Lord, our G-d, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with his commandments and commanded regarding the taking of the Lulav.

The first time one takes the Four Species, he also recites the following blessing:

Baruch atta Ado-nai Elo-heinu melech ha'olam she'hechyanu, vikiyemanu, vi'higyanu la'zman hazeh.

Blessed are you Lord, our G-d, King of the Universe, who has granted us life, sustained us and enabled us to reach this occasion.

The Five Books of Moses begin with the letter *beit* [bereishit] and conclude with the letter *lamed* [yisrael]. The Books of Prophets begin with the letter *vov* [vayehi] and conclude with the letter *lamed* [vayo'al]. Together, these letters spell the word Lulav, which represents all Four Species. This symbolizes that one who fulfills the mitzvah of the Four Species is considered as one who has fulfilled the entire Torah.

Rokeach

The Etrog is a unique tree, in that the taste of the tree is identical to the taste of the fruit that it produces. The Medrash compares the Etrog to the human heart [the Lulav is compared to the spine, the Aravah to the mouth, the Hadass to the eyes], and the message is that when serving the Almighty, the heart must be in sync with its source, the Almighty Himself, from whom it is derived. We are meant to emulate G-d, who is the source of all inspiration, and therefore one whose heart is uninspired as he fulfills mitzvot leaves much to be desired in the way of satisfying the will of the Almighty.

The Four Species represent the four types of Jews. The Etrog, with its pleasant scent and flavor, is symbolic of the righteous who possess Torah [flavor] and mitzvot [fragrance]. The Lulav bears fruit that have a pleasing taste, but it itself has no fragrance. It alludes to Jews who possess Torah [flavor], but no mitzvot [fragrance]. The myrtle gives off a pleasant fragrance, but is tasteless, representing Jews who feature an abundance of good deeds, but little Torah knowledge. The willow branch features neither taste nor fragrance and is representative of Jews who have neither Torah nor mitzvot to their credit.

Although most of us, with our imperfections, fall into one of the latter three categories, the Almighty has no wish to cast any Jew aside. Instead, he commands us to appear before Him as a unified group, so that the merits of one can atone for the others.

Medrash Rabbah, VaYikra 30

From the Chassidic Masters

Only regarding the Etrog does the Torah require that it be especially “Hadar” [beautiful without a blemish]. This is because the Etrog represents the heart, which plays the central role in man’s service of the Almighty. More important than the number of good deeds one actually performs is the amount of “heart” he puts into those that he does. The more love and devotion he puts into his mitzvot, the more beloved they are before the Almighty. Thus, the Etrog must be perfect and beautiful, even more so than the other Species.

Zera Kodesh

An Etrog that is completely dry is not kosher for use on Sukkot. The Etrog represents the human heart, and the message is that one’s heart must not be dried out. It must be alive, beating with passion to serve the Almighty, and sensitive enough to feel the pain of his fellow.

Shevet HaMussar

Although the custom is to perform an elaborate “waving” service with the Four Species, technically, once one lifts these Four Species, he has fulfilled his obligation, provided he holds them all in the manner in which they grow [i.e., upright].

Picking A Winner

Every mitzvah in the Torah is vitally important, yet only one carries with it a mandate that the object used must be beautiful. Regarding the Etrog, the Torah states, “*And you shall take for yourselves a fruit of the beautiful tree.*” Our sages explain that not only must the Etrog be beautiful, but the same also applies to the other three species. Hence, great effort is expended to ensure that the Four Species be of the highest quality and meet very exacting standards. Although a comprehensive list of the qualities required to meet the standard of “beauty” is beyond the scope of this work, here are some of the more outstanding laws:

- The Etrog should feature bumps and ridges, rather than a smooth skin such as found on a lemon.
- Its skin should be exceedingly clean and free of blemishes or discolorations.
- It should not be spherical, but shaped more like a tower.
- The Lulav should be moist and green, rather than dry and brown.
- It should be ramrod straight, not curved like a bow.
- Its top leaf must be whole and not cut off.
- Its leaves should rest tightly one against the next.
- The myrtle should be green and fresh, with average-sized leaves.
- Its top leaves should be present.
- It should feature three-leaf rows [i.e., three leaf clusters should emanate from the same point on the stem].
- Its leaves should be fresh and green.
- The willow should feature long and narrow leaves.
- Its leaves should be green and fresh.
- It should have all its leaves.
- It should grow by the side of a river
- Its stem should be red.

THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS INVALIDATE ANY OF THE FOUR SPECIES:

- It is obtained through theft.
- It is completely dry.
- It is missing its head.
- Its size is smaller than the requisite measure.

Performing the Wave

Although one has performed the mitzvah merely by taking the Four Species in hand, the preferred manner of performing the mitzvah is to lift a bundle of the three Species in one's right hand, and the Etrog in the left, and then thrust them forward and bring them back, lift them upwards and lower them, shaking the Lulav three times in each direction. [Maimonides, Hilchot Lulav 7:9]

The Talmud [*Tractate Sukkah* 37] explains the significance of this practice:

"One waves them to and fro in order to hold back damaging winds; up and down, to negate harmful dews."

Each of the Four Species is dependent on water to sustain its existence, and, by waving them in all six directions, we symbolize to the Sustainer of the universe that just as these Four Species cannot exist without water, so, too, the universe cannot exist without water. Nevertheless, when this critically important water is sent to earth, we request that it be sent forth in a manner that is pleasing and productive instead of harmful.

The Jews and the Nations

In ancient times, on holidays, additional sacrifices were offered in the Holy Temple, symbolizing unique aspects of the celebration. On Sukkot, this practice carried special significance for the non-Jewish nations of the world because many of these additional offerings were brought in their merit. Following the daily offerings, the additional offerings were served upon the Altar, and, each day, a different quantity of offerings was brought. A total of seventy oxen were offered over the course of the festival. Jewish tradition teaches that all the nations of the world originate from seventy core nations. Thus, these seventy oxen corresponded to the seventy nations of the world, summoning Divine blessing on their behalf. Following our own pursuit of atonement on Yom Kippur, the Jewish people then turned to the needs of the entire universe and brought these offerings as a means of gaining atonement on their behalf. The merit of these offerings was so great that the Talmudic sage Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi quipped, "If the nations of the world had known and appreciated the great value the Holy Temple held for them, they would have encircled it with fortresses to protect it. It held even greater value for them than it did for Israel..."

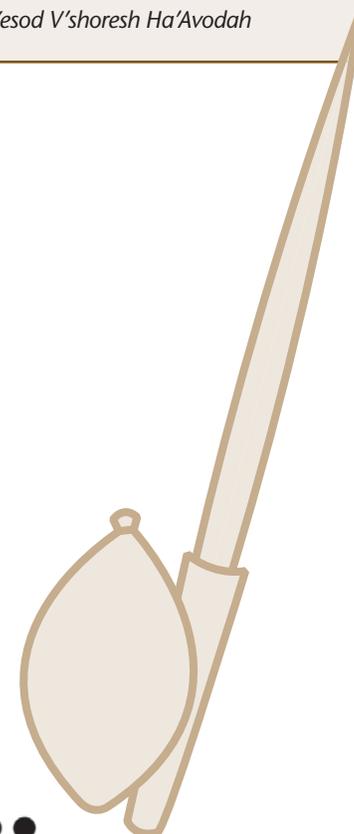
Isn't waving the Four Species in order to avoid harmful rains and dews a violation of the dictum, "Do not serve the Master in order to receive recompense"? More than we desire that G-d not send forth harmful rains, He desires to send forth only pure unadulterated goodness. Our prayer is that G-d should realize His desire to grant the universe only good, without being compelled because of our sins to withhold goodness from us.

Panim Yafos



In truth, although our sages offer a commonsense rationale for the wave service, the Zohar describes profound mystical meditations on which one should concentrate while performing the service. Since, however, these reflections are beyond our limited understanding, our goal should simply be to have in mind that we are performing the will of the Almighty when waving the Four Species. In this manner, the Almighty will consider our meager service as if it was accompanied by the deepest Kabbalistic meditations.

Yesod V'shoresh Ha'Avodah



What did these water libations represent that occasioned so much joy?

The wine and water used in the libations were both very similar and very different. They were similar in that each had to be of exquisite purity. They were dissimilar in the sense that the wine used for libations required extensive preparation, whereas the water required none. It simply had to be drawn from the spring. Each represented an aspect of human service of the Divine. Wine represents an individual who has toiled mightily to serve the Almighty, whereas water represents one whose service of G-d is of a more humble nature. Both types of people are equally precious to G-d, as long as their service is pure and free of foreign thoughts or ulterior motives. More than our actual efforts, the Almighty cherishes the purity of thought that accompanies our Divine service.

From the Chassidic Masters

The ceaseless joy that was experienced in the Holy Temple throughout the seven days of Sukkot was a fountain of joy for the entire world that lasted throughout the year. In its root, it derived from the purity that resulted from the atonement achieved on Yom Kippur that immediately preceded it. Similarly, a bride and groom celebrate their joy for seven days of Sheva Brachot, a joy which has its roots in the atonement they merit on the day of their wedding, and this joy is meant to continue throughout the first year of their marriage.
Sfas Emes

“There was no courtyard in Jerusalem that wasn’t illuminated by the lights of the Simchat Beit HaShoeiva...The pious and righteous men would dance before them with torches that were in their hands and proclaim before them words of praise and song. The Levites played innumerable lyres, harps...trumpets and musical instruments on the fifteen steps that descended from Ezrat Yisrael to the Ezrat Nashim...”

Mishnah, Tractate Sukkah, Chapter 5

The drawing of water contained hints of the joy we will experience when we finally merit the ultimate redemption that will allow us to revel in the performance of G-d’s mitzvot. The same way this simple mitzvah of drawing water for libations elicited such an outpouring of joy, our joy when performing mitzvot unimpeded will know no limits.

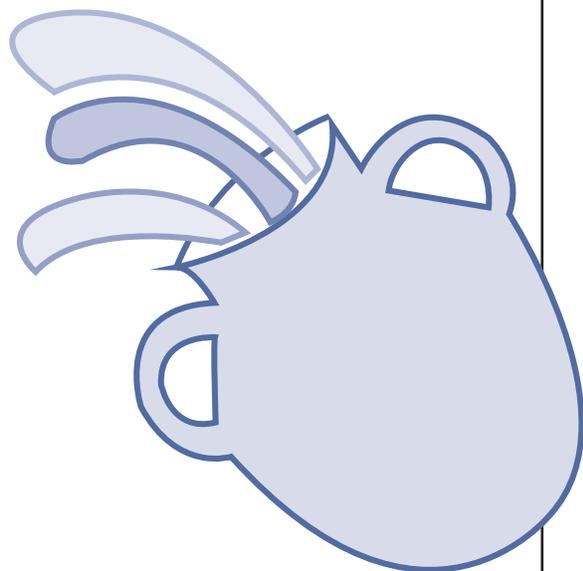
The Water Libations

Regarding one of the unique Sukkot practices, our sages declared, *“He who has not seen the rejoicing at the Simchat Beit HaShoeiva has never witnessed true rejoicing in his life”* [Tractate Sukkah 51a]. What was this ceremony that engendered such joy?

Every Temple offering was accompanied by a meal-offering and a wine libation, which consisted of pouring a prescribed measure of wine on the Altar. Throughout the Festival of Sukkot, a water libation was added to each of the daily morning offerings. Explicit mention of this water libation is not found anywhere in the Torah. Instead, it is a law that was revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai and passed on to us. Our Sages, however, have revealed scriptural allusions to this practice in the verses describing the Sukkot Temple offerings in Numbers

29:12-39. Our sages explain [Tractate Rosh HaShanah 16a] the reason for this water libation: On Sukkot, we are judged regarding how much water we will merit to receive in the coming year. *“Bring before Me a water libation so that the rains of the year will be blessed,”* said the Almighty.

The Water Libation was performed with intense joy and its accompanying celebration, the *Simchat Beit HaShoeiva* [celebration of the place of water-drawing] was a joyous and festive occasion, as well. The waters to be used in the libations were drawn from the Shiloach [Silwan] Pool, and lively dancing and singing accompanied the drawing of the water. The festivities were held in the *Ezrat Nashim*, the courtyard of the outer Temple, and, miraculously, thousands of people were able to fit into a relatively small area to partake of the festivities. Nowadays, we no longer are able to offer these water libations, but we still celebrate the *Simchat Beit HaShoeiva* with singing, dancing, and sharing relevant Torah thoughts.



From the Mystics

Although the practice of drawing water is not mentioned explicitly in Scripture, our sages found an allusion in the verse in Isaiah [12:3], “Therefore with joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation.” The verse refers to the ultimate redemption and explains that just as water is drawn from a well with a sense of confidence that the supply will not run out, so too, we will fully enjoy the ultimate salvation, secure in the knowledge that that Almighty is capable of effecting a full salvation and that all our troubles will be resolved.

Hoshanah Rabbah

The seventh day of Sukkot is known as Hoshanah Rabbah [Great Hoshanah/Supplication], and this day is marked by a special synagogue service, in which seven circuits around the bimah [center platform where the Torah is read] are made by the worshippers while holding their Four Species and reciting special supplications known as Hoshanot. Throughout the rest of Sukkot, only one circuit is made around the platform.

The modern-day observance of the rituals of Hoshanah Rabbah are in commemoration of the Temple Services described in the Mishnah, "Every day they made one circuit around the Altar, and recited the verse, 'We beseech You, G-d, save (us) now! We beseech You, G-d, make us prosper!'...On the day for using the willows [Hoshanah Rabbah], they made seven circuits around the altar. When they withdrew, what did they say? 'Beauty is yours, O altar! Beauty is yours, O altar!...'" Prior to the circuits, huge willow branches were placed around the Altar.

Nowadays, on Hoshanah Rabbah, after completing the seven circuits, we lay aside the Four Species and take in their place a bundle of five willow branches, which we hold in our hand while reciting special supplications. Then,

we beat the willows against the floor of the synagogue, removing some of their leaves. This custom dates back to the times of the prophets, Chaggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The custom to do so three or five times has its roots in mystical sources.



From The Mystics

Why do we beat the willow? As mentioned above, the willow, which possesses neither fruit nor fragrance, is symbolic of the wicked who possess neither Torah nor mitzvot. On Hoshanah Rabbah, when the final judgment is rendered, we select the willow as a representative of our own impoverished state and supplicate, "Hosha Nah" [Please save us, Lord], for it is only by His grace that we can be spared Divine judgment. Furthermore, we beat the willows to symbolize the terrible beatings we have endured through the centuries only because of our allegiance to the Almighty. In that merit, we hope to escape His wrath and merit favorable judgment.

These prayers for redemption are referred to as *Hoshanot*, because each stanza of the prayer is accompanied by the word *hoshanah* — a combination form of the words *hosha* and *nah* (bring us salvation...please). Generally, the compositions recited during the processions consist of twenty-two verses each, arranged in alphabetical order.

Hoshanah Rabbah is the last day upon which we fulfill the mitzvot of the taking of the Four Species and dwelling in the *Sukkah*. The day is referred to as *Hoshanah Rabbah* (lit. the "Great Hoshanah"), because more *Hoshanah* prayers are recited on this day than on the other days.

From the Mystics

While the judgment of man is completed on Yom Kippur, it is not "sealed" until the final day of Sukkot, Hoshanah Rabbah. [The last days of Sukkot, Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, constitute an independent holiday of sorts.]

Zohar

Based upon this, many communities have a custom for the Cantor to don a kittel and to intersperse the prayer service with liturgical compositions from the High Holidays as well. Some communities even have a custom to blow the Shofar after each of the seven circuits. In most communities, the white *parochet* [curtain on the Ark], which is hung beginning the High Holidays, remains up until after Hoshanah Rabbah.

From the Chassidic Masters

In Jewish law, a seal within a seal is sufficient to remove all suspicions of tampering. When the judgment is rendered on Yom Kippur and then sealed on Hoshanah Rabbah, that constitutes a double seal and renders the favorable judgment entirely impervious to tampering by the prosecuting angels who seek to harm Israel.

Rabbi Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

Why is there an emphasis on willows on Hoshanah Rabbah? Throughout the holiday of Sukkot, the world is judged regarding water. Since the final judgment will be rendered on Hoshanah Rabbah, willows which grow near water are utilized in the performance of the service to increase our merit and hopefully elicit a favorable judgment.

Sefer Rokeach

The name "Atzeret" means to "hold back," and conveys the essence of this separate, yet related holiday. Following the seven days of Sukkot, the Torah did not desire that we return unchanged to our former lives. Therefore we are commanded to spend an additional day taking stock of all we have achieved throughout the High Holiday and Sukkot season. Thus, it is an independent holiday designed to enable us to make the transition from the holidays to daily living, without losing track of any of the spiritual qualities we attained through the holidays that preceded it.

Since we are no longer required to sit in the Sukkah, it is appropriate at this time to begin mentioning our need for rain in our prayers. Customarily, in his repetition of the Mussaf Amidah, the cantor will recite the "Geshem" [rain] prayer, which mentions the various merits we summon in order to be worthy of abundant rainfall throughout the planting season. From that point on, a brief mention of rain in the form of "Mashiv HaRuach U'Morid HaGeshem" [The One Who makes the wind blow and makes the rain descend] is recited in the daily Amidah until the first day of Passover. At a later date, another more specific request for rain is inserted into the daily Amidah as well.

In truth, at this point, we still do not actually request rain in the daily Amidah, for fear that the visitors who traditionally came to Jerusalem to celebrate the holiday would endure difficult and dangerous travel conditions on their way home. Instead, we mention rain now as a means of currying Divine favor, but only begin to request it on December 4th.

From the Chassidic Masters

Our sages explained that the reason for the extra holiday of Shmini Atzeret is because the Almighty so-to-speak said, "It is too difficult for Me to bear your parting." Yet, this refers not only to our parting from the Almighty, but also to the fact that all those assembled in Jerusalem for the holiday would now depart from one another. Sukkot was a wonderful opportunity for Jews to unify and solidify their unique bonds as a nation and the thought that this special convocation was about to come to a conclusion necessitated the addition of another day to the holiday to prolong the festivities.
R' Yitzchak of Vorkeh

Shmini Atzeret

The seven days of Sukkot lead into another segment of the holiday that is essentially independent, yet related to Sukkot — Shmini Atzeret. It is described in the Torah [Leviticus 23:34] as follows:

"On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the Festival of Sukkot, seven days for the Lord... on the eighth day, there shall be a holy convocation for you."

On Shmini Atzeret, the Four Species are not taken and the special holiday insert in the Amidah and Kiddush is changed from "Chag HaSukkot HaZeh" to "Shmini Chag Ha'Atzeret HaZeh." Although sitting in the Sukkah is technically unnecessary, varying customs abound regarding how, and if, one does so. Chassidic Jews usually host a small kiddush in the Sukkah on the morning of Shmini Atzeret, but conduct their meals in the house. Others have a custom to eat their meals in the Sukkah on Shmini Atzeret, but do not recite the blessing "Leishev BaSukkah" customarily recited when one is obligated to sit in the Sukkah.

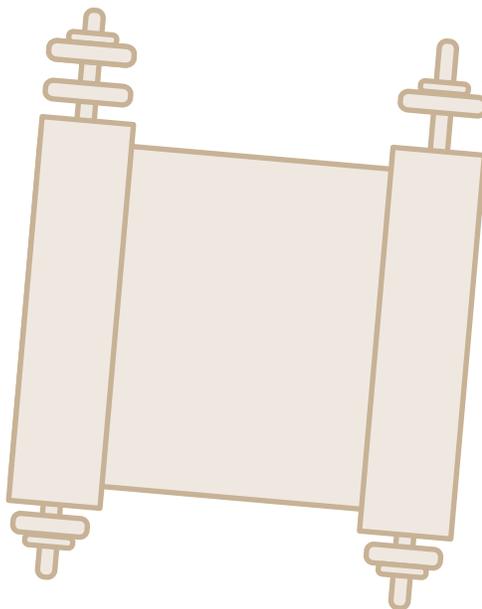


Simchat Torah

In Israel, where only one day of Yom Tov [with the exception of Rosh Hashanah], is celebrated, Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are celebrated simultaneously. In the Diaspora, where each day of the holiday is celebrated for two days, Shmini Atzeret is celebrated for two days, with the focus on the second day being Simchat Torah, a celebration of the completion of the public Torah reading cycle. The Torah scrolls are removed from the Ark and read in the evening, unlike the rest of the year, when the Torah is read in public only by day. The following morning, the last parshah of Deuteronomy and the first parshah of Genesis are read in the synagogue. Prior to the Torah readings, all the Torah scrolls are removed from the Ark and carried round the *bimah* [center platform], accompanied by lively singing and dancing for a total of seven *Hakafot* [circuits].

Although each *Hakafah* technically need only consist of one circuit around the *bimah*, in practice, each *Hakafah* generally lasts a good amount of time. The songs chosen are traditionally laden with inspirational messages about the primacy of Torah, its study, G-d's kindness and the importance of attaining a share of the World to Come. Children wave flags and often receive an abundance of sweets from generous adults, who seek to make a connection in the minds of the youngsters between sweetness and the Torah.

Some have a custom to imbibe alcoholic beverages and wish each other "*L'chaim*" [to life], because Torah is frequently referred to as the "elixir of life" in traditional sources. In most congregations, the custom is that everyone is granted an *Aliyah* [opportunity to recite blessings over the reading of the Torah] — even young children under the age of Bar Mitzvah — in order to train them in the reading of the Torah.



After achieving Divine forgiveness for their own transgressions during the High Holiday period preceding Sukkot, the Jewish nation involved itself in gaining pardon for all the nations of the world through the 70 sacrificial offerings over the Sukkot holiday. The last day of the holiday (Shmini Atzeret) is a "farewell day" between G-d and His people Israel. Our Sages characterize this final day of the holiday season as follows: "G-d said, 'Your departure at the end of this festival period is difficult for Me to bear. Stay one more day [and let us celebrate intimately, without busying yourself with efforts on behalf of others].'" This moment of intimacy allows us to experience appreciation and joy for the illumination of the Torah that we have experienced in the past and the anticipation of what we hope to gain in the future.

Why do we conclude Sukkot with Simchat Torah, a day celebrating our study of Torah? Sukkot celebrates the culmination of the harvest season, which required huge investments of time and effort, leaving little time for Torah study. By celebrating Simchat Torah we are demonstrating that as soon as the harvest is done, our minds must immediately turn to Torah and its study, an activity that gives us great joy.

Sforno

From The Chassidic Masters

Why do we encircle the *bimah* with Torah scrolls on Simchat Torah? Throughout the holiday, we encircled the Torah scrolls with the Four Species [while reciting the daily *Hoshanah* prayer], and this symbolized how mitzvot bring the holy words of the Torah to light. Through the performance of each mitzvah, we give life to the words of the Torah. Now, we take the Torah scrolls and hold them to our chest in an effort to light up our hearts and souls with the holy words of Torah. These words uplift us spiritually and carry us throughout the year.

Tiferes Shlomo

From The Mystics

Beginning with Elul, the month leading up to Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur and continuing until Hoshanah Rabbah when the final judgment is sealed, one experiences a degree of trepidation, unsure of his verdict. Once Hoshanah Rabbah has passed, the soul experiences a lightening of the mood, which allows a person to experience joy in its fullest measure. Rather than channel that joy into mindless pursuits, we direct it toward the Torah and its study, which is why we celebrate Simchat Torah [The Joy of Torah] at the conclusion of Sukkot.

From the Chassidic Masters

One Simchat Torah, Rabbi Naftoli of Ropshitz noticed a man who seemed overtaken by the joyous nature of the day. He danced and sang with gusto and continued to do so throughout the day. This puzzled Rabbi Naftoli, for the man was a simple porter who knew little about Torah and certainly could not have ever experienced the depths of its delights. As he watched the fellow continue to celebrate until late into the afternoon, Rabbi Naftoli finally approached him to inquire as to the source of his ecstatic joy. His answer left Rabbi Naftoli speechless. "Rebbe, my accomplishments in Torah are indeed nothing special, but my fellow Jews who are knowledgeable have much to celebrate. Now, if my brother celebrates a *simcha* [joyous occasion], should I not be overjoyed for him?"

Why do we read the last parshah in the Torah and immediately commence reading the very first parshah? Were we to read the last parshah and then conclude the service, the Prosecuting Angel in heaven would claim that our celebration derives from the fact that we have concluded the Torah and have no intention of returning to it. By immediately starting over at the beginning, we demonstrate that our joy stems from a deep love of Torah, which can never truly be sated, and our intent is to study it repeatedly without stop.

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Make It Meaningful

If Sukkot this year is just like all the others in past years, it will not have the same meaning. Here are six suggestions for how you can make this Sukkot even more meaningful than all the others:

- 1. The Great Outdoors:** If you haven't yet invested in a Sukkah, there's no better time than now. Easy-to-assemble Sukkot are available in a wide range of prices, sizes and colors, and you'll save on your air-conditioning bills.
- 2. Get Together With Friends:** Sukkot just isn't the same when it's limited to the family. Invite some friends over, especially those who don't get invited elsewhere, and spread the joy.
- 3. Membership Has Its Privileges:** Don't spend all that membership money just to attend synagogue on the High Holidays. Make sure to attend on Sukkot as well, and get your money's worth.
- 4. Be A Mover And A Shaker:** Pick up a nice set of Four Species in advance of the holiday and move and shake with the rest.
- 5. Just Beat It:** If you've never done a Hoshanah Rabbah service, this is the year to start. Say it in English so you can appreciate what you're asking for and then beat those willows until their leaves leave.
- 6. Dance For Your Life:** Don't settle for a relaxed and tranquil Simchat Torah experience. Locate a synagogue that goes all-out and dance until the scroll is embedded in your soul.

Points to Ponder

If the Sukkah is supposed to commemorate the huts in the desert when we left Egypt, why don't we celebrate it in April?

- Why must the covering of the Sukkah be so flimsy?
- Could you upgrade your level of faith in the Almighty? If the answer is yes, consider how sitting in a Sukkah can help you do so.
- Why don't more Jews take the Four Species?
- Why can't anyone invent a bee-trap that actually works?
- Is your joy on Simchat Torah alcohol-induced or Torah-induced?
- If there's one lesson to take from the holiday of Sukkot, what would it be?