

OLAMI MENTORSHIP



**SPECIAL
SUKKOT**

THE TIME OF OUR JOY

Just days after Yom Kippur, the Jewish calendar turns from awe to joy. Sukkot is called Z'man Simchateinu, the Time of Our Joy. After the intensity of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we move into a week of gratitude, family, community, and celebration.

Sukkot has two central mitzvot: dwelling in the sukkah and taking the Four Species. It then leads directly into two more holidays, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. This guide walks through each one: what we do, and why we do it.



THE HOLIDAY AT A GLANCE

Sukkot lasts seven days, followed by Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. Outside of Israel, the season looks like this:

DAY	2026 DATES (OUTSIDE ISRAEL)
Sukkot begins	Friday evening, September 25
Yom Tov (Days 1–2)	Saturday, Sept. 26 (also Shabbat) and Sunday, Sept. 27
Chol Hamoed	Monday, Sept. 28 – Friday, Oct. 2
Hoshana Rabbah	Friday, October 2 (last day of Sukkot)
Shemini Atzeret	Friday evening, Oct. 2 – Saturday night, Oct. 3 (also Shabbat)
Simchat Torah	Saturday night, Oct. 3 – Sunday night, Oct. 4



YOM TOV

The first two days of Sukkot are Yom Tov, holy days that resemble Shabbat. We refrain from melachah, the categories of creative work prohibited on Shabbat, such as writing, driving, and using electrical devices. Yom Tov differs from Shabbat in a few ways: cooking for the holiday, transferring an existing flame, and carrying outdoors are permitted. This year, the first day of Sukkot falls on Shabbat, so the full Shabbat rules apply that day.

CHOL HAMOED

The middle days are called Chol Hamoed, the “intermediate days.” They are still part of the holiday. We continue to eat in the sukkah and take the Four Species, but most of the Yom Tov restrictions are relaxed and many ordinary activities are permitted. The last of these days, Hoshana Rabbah, is marked by special prayers and has its own significance as the final day of Sukkot.

SHEMINI ATZERET AND SIMCHAT TORAH

The season closes with two more Yom Tov days, with the same restrictions as the first days of Sukkot. This year Shemini Atzeret is also Shabbat, so the full Shabbat rules apply, and preparations for Simchat Torah cannot begin until Saturday night. (In Israel, Sukkot has one Yom Tov day at the start, and Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are celebrated together on a single day.)

THE SUKKAH

The holiday takes its name from the sukkah, a small, temporary hut. We build it in a backyard, on a porch, or in another open space, and cover it with s'chach: branches, bamboo, or other plant material that grew from the ground and has been cut. The s'chach must be dense enough to give more shade than sun, but ideally open enough to glimpse the stars. For seven days, the sukkah becomes our home. We eat our meals there, spend time with family and friends, and many people sleep there as well.

The Torah gives the reason:

"You shall dwell in sukkot for seven days... so that your generations will know that I had the Children of Israel dwell in sukkot when I took them out of the land of Egypt."

Vayikra 23:42-43

But what exactly were those "sukkot"? The Talmud (Sukkah 11b) records two opinions.





THE CLOUDS OF GLORY

According to Rabbi Eliezer, the sukkot were the Ananei HaKavod, the Clouds of Glory, which surrounded and sheltered the Jewish people throughout their journey from Egypt to the Land of Israel. When we leave our homes for a simple sukkah, we remember that God protected our ancestors in the wilderness, and that He continues to watch over us today.

REAL HUTS IN THE DESERT

According to Rabbi Akiva, the sukkot were actual huts in which the Jewish people lived for forty years in the wilderness. Their lives were visibly dependent on God: manna fell from heaven, water came from a miraculous well, and they had no permanent home of their own. By living in a temporary structure, we remember where we came from and recognize that everything we have ultimately comes from God.

THE MESSAGE

Both explanations point in the same direction. Our houses, bank accounts, and plans can make us feel self-sufficient. For one week, we step out of that illusion. Sitting under a flimsy roof, we see that our real security was never the walls around us.



TALK IT OVER

**WHERE IN YOUR OWN LIFE DO YOU FEEL MOST
“PROTECTED”? IS THAT SECURITY REAL, OR DOES
IT DEPEND ON THINGS THAT COULD CHANGE?**

**WHY DO YOU THINK THE TORAH ASKS US TO
ACTUALLY MOVE OUTSIDE, RATHER THAN SIMPLY
THINK ABOUT THESE IDEAS?**



THE FOUR SPECIES

The second central mitzvah of Sukkot is taking the arba minim, the Four Species:

- Lulav – a palm branch
- Hadasim – myrtle branches
- Aravot – willow branches
- Etrog – a citron fruit

The lulav, hadasim, and aravot are bound together and held in one hand, with the etrog in the other. We recite a blessing, bring the species together, and wave them in all six directions: the four directions of the compass, up, and down, acknowledging that God is present everywhere. The mitzvah is performed each day of Sukkot except Shabbat, so this year we begin on Sunday.

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 30) offers two well-known interpretations of the Four Species.

SERVING GOD WITH OUR WHOLE SELVES

The Four Species resemble four parts of the human body:

- The etrog is shaped like the heart: our emotions and inner character.
- The lulav is like the spine: strength, integrity, and the courage to stand tall for what is right.
- The hadas leaf is shaped like the eye: how we see the world and the opportunities for good around us.
- The aravah leaf is shaped like the lips: the power of our words.

Bringing them together says that serving God is not one compartment of life. It includes what we feel, what we do, what we see, and what we say.

EVERY JEW COUNTS

The Midrash also compares the Four Species to four kinds of Jews. Taste represents Torah learning; fragrance represents good deeds.

- The etrog has both taste and fragrance: a person with both Torah and good deeds.
- The lulav comes from the date palm, whose fruit has taste but no fragrance: a person rich in learning but lacking in deeds.
- The hadas has fragrance but no taste: a person of good deeds with less learning.
- The aravah has neither: a person who, for now, has neither.

Yet the mitzvah is only fulfilled when all four are held together. If even one is missing, the mitzvah is not fulfilled at all. As the Midrash concludes, let them all be bound together, and they will atone for one another. No Jew is expendable, and none of us is complete without the others.



TALK IT OVER

WHICH OF THE FOUR “BODY PARTS” COMES MOST NATURALLY TO YOU IN LIVING A MEANINGFUL LIFE? WHICH IS HARDEST?

WHY WOULD THE TORAH MAKE THE ARAVAH, WITH NO TASTE OR FRAGRANCE AT ALL, INDISPENSABLE TO THE MITZVAH?





WHY THE “TIME OF OUR JOY”?

The Torah commands, “You shall rejoice on your festival” (Devarim 16:14), and Sukkot is the holiday most associated with joy. It comes right after Yom Kippur for a reason. We have been forgiven, we are loved, and now it is time to celebrate.

Sukkot also teaches something counterintuitive about happiness. We leave our comfortable homes and discover that we can be happier with less. The sukkah invites us to slow down, look up at the sky, appreciate what we already have, and spend time with the people who matter most. Joy, it turns out, comes less from what we own than from gratitude and connection.

TALK IT OVER

THINK OF A TIME YOU WERE GENUINELY HAPPY. HOW MUCH DID IT HAVE TO DO WITH POSSESSIONS OR COMFORT?

WHAT IS ONE THING YOU COULD “STEP OUT OF” THIS WEEK TO MAKE MORE ROOM FOR JOY?



SHEMINI ATZERET AND SIMCHAT TORAH

SHEMINI ATZERET

Shemini Atzeret, “the Eighth Day of Assembly,” immediately follows Sukkot. It is closely connected to Sukkot but is a separate holiday, and we no longer take the Four Species. Rashi compares it to a king who hosted his children for a week-long celebration. When it was time for them to leave, he said, “Your parting is difficult for me. Please stay one more day.” After a week of celebration, God asks us to remain with Him for one more day, simply to be together.

The obligation of the sukkah ends with Sukkot. Outside of Israel, though, the common practice is still to eat in the sukkah on Shemini Atzeret, without reciting the blessing *leishev basukkah*.



SIMCHAT TORAH

The next day is Simchat Torah, “Rejoicing with the Torah.” We complete the annual cycle of Torah reading with the final portion of Devarim, and then immediately begin again with Bereishit. The Torah never truly ends; as soon as we reach the last verse, we return to the first. The day is filled with singing and dancing with the Torah scrolls, often for hours.

TALK IT OVER

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU THAT GOD
“ASKS US TO STAY ONE MORE DAY”?**

**WHY DO YOU THINK WE START BEREISHIT
AGAIN IMMEDIATELY, INSTEAD OF
PAUSING TO CELEBRATE THE FINISH?**



THE ARC OF THE SEASON

Taken together, the fall holidays tell a single story. We begin with the reflection and repentance of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We move into the gratitude and joy of Sukkot. And we conclude on Simchat Torah by celebrating our connection to God, to our people, and to the Torah.

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