

## SUKKOT OVERVIEW

Immediately after the Jewish Days of Awe – Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur – comes the less-known holiday of *Sukkot*; the Feast of Booths. This year, the holiday begins Friday evening (at sunset) October 2nd and lasts until Sunday, October 11<sup>th</sup>.

Like many Jewish holidays, it has both an agricultural theme and a historical theme. This reminds us both of the land of Israel (it is the harvest-time there) and of the history of the Jewish people. When the Jewish people left Egypt and were wandering in the desert, God sheltered them in protective dwellings called *Sukkot*.

The agricultural theme of the holiday also brings out its universal motifs. All of us, no matter our religion, can take a moment to offer thanks to God for all that we have been able to gather close to ourselves in our lives. Even if we are not farmers gathering in the harvest, we can give thanks for our families, our paychecks, our homes etc. *Sukkot* is called “the time of our joy” and is a spiritual precursor to the more secular Thanksgiving holiday.

Jews celebrate *Sukkot* by building temporary *sukka* dwellings for the eight-day holiday. Jewish custom is to eat meals and spend leisure and quality time in the *sukka* and – in some places – even sleep overnight there. It is also a time when families and friends come together to celebrate.

The most important part of the *sukka* itself is the roof, which must be made of items – such as bamboo or palm branches – that grow from the ground. This loose covering allows one to see the stars while sitting in the *sukka*; it is an opportunity to reflect on the beauty of the world that God created.

When the weather is bad, we go indoors, as sitting in the *sukka* is meant to be a pleasant experience. The *sukka* is usually decorated with festive holiday hangings and posters and children’s artwork.

Another element of the *Sukkot* holiday is the taking and gentle shaking of the Four Species – palm branch (*lulav*), citron (*etrog*), myrtle, and willow. These four contribute to the harvest festival-feel of the holiday. Some Jewish philosophers have said that the greatness of sitting in a *sukka* is that it is an act that one can do with one’s whole body. Similarly, the palm represents the spine, the citron the heart, the myrtle the eyes and the willow the lips, suggesting that we should devote our entire bodies to this celebration.



Finally, Jewish tradition teaches that on *Sukkot*, the world is judged for its water. Since we know the devastating effects of drought on millions of human beings in the world, it is a good opportunity to pray for a plentiful gift of water this year so that we will all have enough to drink and to grow the crops we depend upon for our survival. *Enjoy the holiday!*

For any questions please feel free to reach out to Rabbi Daniel Kraus [rdk@ckj.org](mailto:rdk@ckj.org)



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