



IN YOUR HOME

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Sukkot and Simchat Torah • סוכות ושמחת תורה

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Shalom Parents,

Sukkot and Simchat Torah are fun holidays!

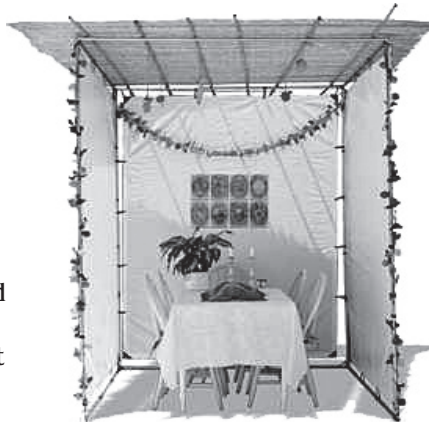
The nine-day holiday period begins with *Sukkot* on the fifteenth of the Hebrew month of *Tishrei* (five days after *Yom Kippur*) and culminates with *Simchat Torah*. Reform Jews generally observe an eight-day holiday, celebrating *Simchat Torah* on the eighth day, as is done in Israel.

Sukkot, a time of sharing and thanksgiving,

celebrates the start of autumn and reaping of summer crops, commemorating a time when the Israelites became a united people.

The *lulav* and *etrog*, symbolic of vegetation that grows in Israel, are important *Sukkot* rituals. They are held together, shaken and waved in specific ways, while reciting a particular blessing, as commanded in the *Torah*. The *lulav* is made up of three special plants (palm, myrtle, and willow) which are bound together, and held with the *etrog*, or citron. They may be purchased at a Jewish bookstore or synagogue.

Building, decorating and living in booths is essential to Sukkot. Israelite farmers built booths in ancient times. They lived together in villages, going out to work in their fields every morning and returning home in the evening. But when crops were ripe there was not time to go back and forth. Farmers worked their fields from early morning until nighttime, harvesting as needed and resting nearby in little huts they had built (called "*sukkot*" and translated as "booths"). Joyful feasting followed the harvest.



Jews have celebrated Sukkot by building booths throughout the ages. Today's *sukkah* is a replica of the original booths. The act of building it, decorating it, welcoming guests in it, eating in it and sometimes sleeping in it, enhances *Sukkot* celebrations. Today's *sukkah*, like biblical ones, is built with at least three walls and a roof that is sparsely covered with branches so that stars are visible at night.

Simchat Torah comes on the ninth day of this joyous festival when the year's reading of the *Torah* is completed and then begun again with the reading of

Genesis. On *Simchat Torah* evening and during the next day, *Torah* scrolls are taken from the *Torah* Ark and carried around the synagogue as celebrants sing and dance in a joyful procession. *Torah* scrolls are carried around the synagogue seven times instead of the usual once. Each time around is called a *hakafah* (*hakafot* in plural). Children of all ages are encouraged to join the procession, while waving special flags. The flags remind us of those carried through the desert to the Promised Land by the twelve tribes of Israel after the Exodus from Egypt as described in the *Torah*.

Holiday dates this year are:

Erev Sukkot (the first evening of *Sukkot*):
Wednesday, October 12.

The first two days of the holiday (when many people attend synagogue services and refrain from working): Thursday and Friday October 13 and 14.

Simchat Torah: The evening of Thursday October 20 and Friday October 21.

HAVING FUN AT HOME

HOW CAN YOU BUILD A SUKKAH?

It's so much fun to build one's own *sukkah*. A pre-fabricated one may be bought at a Jewish book store or one can be built from scratch. It is usually erected as soon after *Yom Kippur* as possible. It does not need to be elegant and may be decorated any way you like. Check for ideas in *The Jewish Catalogue* (p. 129, Jewish Publication Society, 1973).

When building a *sukkah*, consider ideas below: If your family chooses not to build a *sukkah*, you can do many of the suggested activities in your home.

SELECT A SITE: Find one that has nothing hanging above it; (a roof or a tree branch).

With your child: Walk around your yard searching for the best location.



THE WALLS: It must have at least two complete walls and a small part of a third one. You don't need to build all three walls; you can use the side of a building, and build only two others. Use any material, being creative and having fun, as long as the walls are sturdy enough to withstand a normal wind.

THE ROOF: *S'chach* (roof material on the *sukkah*) can be made from branches of any tree, as long as it was live when it was cut. It must be made from material that grows from the ground (branches or leaves or wooden slats or shrubbery; but not metal or food) and presently detached from the ground (Don't just

bend a tree over the top of your *sukkah*). It should be covered, giving more shade than sun during the day, while not preventing rain from coming through and open enough for stars to be visible through the roof at night.

With your child: Gather materials to create the roof.

DECORATING: Since the *sukkah* is considered your "home" for the eight days (but not used on *Simchat Torah*), it is customary to decorate it nicely. You can hang fruits, flowers and strung beads and decorate the walls with posters, pictures and your children's unique works. Try these ideas:

Pine Cone Decorations

Materials: pine cones, water paints (in a variety of colors), paint brushes, glue, glitter, yarn (cut in 2 foot lengths).

Procedure: Gather pine cones with your child. Paint some. Place glue and glitter on others. When the pine cones have dried, hang them from the *sukkah* roof with yarn, or place them in a bowl as a table centerpiece.



Leaf Picture Decorations

Materials: leaves, glue, paper, safety pins or tape.

Procedure: Gather fallen leaves with your child. Glue them onto papers. When the glue has dried, attach the papers to the walls of the *sukkah*, using safety pins (if the walls are fabric) or tape (if the walls are a hard surface).

SUKKOT AND SIMCHAT TORAH WORDS

Erev: Literally meaning "evening," it refers to the first evening of a holiday.

Etrog: A citron held with the *lulav* on *Sukkot*.

Lulav: Made by combining branches from palm, myrtle and willow trees, it is held together with the *etrog* on the first seven days of *Sukkot* (but not on *Simchat Torah*), while reciting a special blessing.

Ushpizin: Meaning "guests" and pronounced "ooshpeezen," it is customary to invite our ancestors to spiritually join us in our *sukkah*.

Schach: Branches that form the *sukkah* roof.

Hakkafot: A joyous procession when the *Torah* scrolls are carried around the synagogue seven times on *Simchat Torah*.

WHAT CAN YOU DO IN YOUR SUKKAH?

During *Sukkot* we eat, drink, and study in the *sukkah*, and often invite guests to join us there. Some people even sleep there if possible.

WELCOME GUESTS (*Ushpizin*):

According to Kabbalistic tradition, seven spiritual guests (biblical Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph and David) visit the *sukkah*, each on one of the days that we eat there. Some people like to include other spiritual guests; like biblical Sarah, Rebecca Leah, Rachel, Deborah, Ruth and Esther... or others of your choosing. Decide with your family which *ushpizin* to invite. Make posters with those names and hang them in

your *sukkah*. The spiritual guest for each day is invited before the meal as we say "Enter, exalted holy guest (the name of the guest)..."

Making *Ushpizin* pictures

Materials: A large roll of paper, scissors, crayons or markers, tape.

Procedure: Would your child's guests like to be *ushpizin*? Suggest that a guest lie down on a large piece of paper on the floor. Another person should first trace and then color in her outline using crayons or markers. Cut out the completed outline, write the guest's name on it and hang it on your *sukkah* wall.

SING: Purchase a music cd from a Jewish book store and play it in your *sukkah*.

With your child: Sing songs he knows from school.

READ: See recommended books on page four

With your child: Select favorite books to read together in the *sukkah*.

EAT: *Sukkot* menus, reflecting the harvest festival, generally include dishes with fresh fruits and vegetables. Stuffed vegetables are typical; some say because, like cornucopia, they represent a bountiful harvest.

With your child: Decide on fruits and vegetables to include in meals and purchase them together.

touch and smell the *lulav* and *etrog*. If you decide not to purchase them, visit a synagogue on *Sukkot* when others might be using them (They are not used on *Simchat Torah*) and offer opportunities for you and your child to hold and shake them.

SIMCHAT TORAH

CARRY AND WAVE A SIMCHAT TORAH FLAG:

Simchat Torah is particularly happy and is usually very child-centered. Children are encouraged to join in the procession, usually waving special flags.

Making A Flag

Materials: A large square piece of white construction paper, scissors, a blue crayon or marker, a paper towel roll, tape or glue.

Procedure: Fold a large rectangular piece of construction paper in half and then in half again, creating four boxes. Cut out the lower right box. Decorate the top right box with a blue star in the middle and a blue strip above and below the star. Roll the left half of the paper around a long cardboard roll. Tape or glue the rolled paper to the cardboard roll. You've made an Israeli flag.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO TO CELEBRATE?

SUKKOT

BLESS THE LULAV AND ETROG:

An important *Sukkot* observance is the blessing of the *lulav* and *etrog*. Hold them together and wave them in all directions to acknowledge God's sovereignty over nature while saying the appropriate blessing.

With your child: Visit a Jewish bookstore to see,



RECOMMENDED SELECTION OF BOOKS

FOR 2 –4 YEAR OLDS

Let's Build a Sukkah, pictures by K.J.Kahn, Kar-Ben Copies, Inc., 1991. Two year olds enjoy the feel and look of this ten-page board book that includes a simple story with few words.

Tamar's Sukkah, E. Gellman, Kar-Ben Copies, Inc., 1999. In this board book Tamar's friends help her decorate her *sukkah*.

It's Sukkah Time! by L.B.Kropf, Kar-Ben Publishing, Inc., 2004. This charming book includes *Sukkot* blessings, craft activities, and beautiful photos of children who build, decorate and enjoy their *sukkah*.

FOR 4-7 YEAR OLDS

Night Lights: A Sukkot Story by B.D. Goldin, UAHC Press, 1995. A young boy learns about the meaning, history and customs of *Sukkot* while overcoming his fear of the dark.

Bubbe Isabella and the Sukkot Cake by K. Terwilliger, Kar-Ben Publishing, 2005. Every evening Bubbe Isabella invites holiday guests to enjoy her special lemon cake in her *sukkah*. What a surprise when she learns that the guests are more interested in nibbling the *sukkah* than in trying her cake!

Hillel Builds A House by S. Lepon, Kar-Ben Copies, Inc., 1993. Hillel loves to build a different kind of house for each holiday. In preparation for *Sukkot*, his parents help him build a *sukkah*.

Engineer Ari and the Sukkah Express by D. B. Cohen, Kar-Ben Publishing, 2010. At the start of *Sukkot*, Engineer Ari drives his train to Jerusalem, stopping along the way to gather branches and fruit for his backyard *sukkah*. When *Sukkot* begins, while Ari is sad that his friends can't help him celebrate, his pals Jessie and Nathaniel have a surprise waiting for him at the train station This is a sequel to the Sydney Taylor Honor Award Winner *Engineer Ari and the Rosh Hashanah Ride*.

**Greater than Gold and Silver** by Rav N.

Ehrmann, Feldheim, 2009. What happens when a poor peddler buys the only *etrog* in town? Will he sell his *mitzvah* for a vast fortune? The answers lie in this fascinating story.

K'tonton's Sukkot Adventure

by Sadie Rose Weilerstein, Jewish Publication Society, 1993. K'tonton, the lovable Jewish Tom Thumb, has cast a magic spell on children for generations.

From the moment of K'tonton's enchanted arrival, he takes us on a magic carpet ride into the magical synagogue, where he swings dangerously from the end of a *lulav* (palm branch). Enjoy this marvelous adventure and learn about *Sukkot*, its traditions, and its rituals.

FOR 6-10 YEAR OLDS

My Very Own Simchat Torah by J.R. Saypol & M. Wikler, Kar-Ben Copies, Inc., 1981. Explanations of *Simchat Torah's* essential elements are presented, along with several songs in this book, appropriate for children and their parents.

The Mysterious Guests: A Sukkot Story by E.A. Kimmel, Holiday House, 2008. Each of two brothers celebrates *Sukkot* by building a *sukkah*. The very rich one adorns his with great riches, celebrating with only the richest guests, while his poor brother builds a *sukkah* with found materials and invites all to share with him. Three mysterious guests visit each brother, leaving behind a special blessing.

FOR 8-11 YEAR OLDS

All About Sukkot, by J. Groner & M. Wikler, Kar-Ben Copies, Inc., 1998. This beautifully illustrated book, a wonderful resource for children and parents, includes information on *Sukkot*, a *Sukkot* story, a home *Sukkot* service and traditional songs.

And **Websites:**

www.urj.org/holidays/sukkot
www.emanuelnyc.org/simple.php/wor_activities_simchat
www.aish.com/holidays
www.chabad.org/holidays



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