

T H E F A L L F E S T I V A L S A T C A I

SUKKOT is one of the three major pilgrimage festivals of the Jewish year. At the time of the Temple in Jerusalem, Jews would come from all over Israel to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival. Sukkot is known by a number of different names, each signifying a different aspect of the holiday.

THE FEAST OF BOOTHS

Sukkot reminds us of the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness after our freedom from Egypt. During those years, the Jews could not live in a permanent home so they lived in huts and booths. Remembering that wandering of our ancestors, the Torah commands us by saying, "Ye shall dwell in booths seven days — that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt."

Thus, the first aspect of the holiday relates to the Sukkah, so we are commanded to build and live in a hut or tabernacle. The first two days of Sukkot are each a Yom Tov, festival days, with many of the laws similar to those of the Sabbath. Next there are five intermediate days called Hol Hamoed, which, while still the holiday, are much like weekdays in that we can go to work and resume most usual activities. Then there begins a new holiday, which in the Diaspora is celebrated on two days. The first is called Shemini Atzeret, followed the next day by Simhat Torah. These two days are also each a Yom Tov, full holy days, in which we are not permitted to work.

THE FESTIVAL OF INGATHERING

Sukkot also has a strong agricultural component. Our ancestors completed the fall harvest and thanked God for the bounty they had received. Sukkot is really the first recorded celebration of Thanksgiving.

THE SEASON OF REJOICING

Because of the great joy with which the festival was celebrated, Sukkot is referred to as the most joyous of all festivals, and thus is called in the Prayer Book, "The Season of Our Rejoicing."



SUKKOT OBSERVANCES

The two main ritual observances of the festival are eating in the Sukkah and fulfilling the obligation of making the prayer with the Lulav and Etrog during each of the days of Sukkot, except for the Sabbath.

A Sukkah is a building consisting of a minimum of two walls and the beginning of a third, supporting a temporary roof holding the Sechah, which is anything that grew in the ground and is no longer attached.

LULAV AND ETROG

The other significant and unique ritual for Sukkot is the taking together of the four species. In one hand we hold the Lulav, which is a palm frond attached to willows and myrtle twigs. In the other hand we hold the Etrog, the citron. Holding all four together, each day we make the blessing, and at services we have a procession called Hoshanot at which time all of the people who have the set of four species parade in a circle around the sanctuary while chanting special prayers.

HOSHANAH RABBAH

The seventh day of Sukkot is known as Hoshanah Rabbah. During the morning service, the procession with the Etrog and Lulav is repeated seven times while the Hazzan chants the Hoshanot hymns asking for God's help. Towards the end of the service, branches of willows are beaten so that our sins, symbolically, fall just as the willow leaves drop off.

SHEMINI ATZERET

Shemini Atzeret, the eighth day of Sukkot, is in effect, a separate holiday. We are no longer obligated to remain in the Sukkah. During the service, we pray for rain in Israel to nourish the crops.

DANCE WITH ME ON SIMHAT TORAH

For generations, our people have closed our observance of the Fall Festivals (Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret) with the celebration of Simhat Torah (rejoicing with the Torah). It is on Simhat Torah that we complete the reading of the Torah and immediately return to the beginning of the Book of Genesis to start the cycle of reading again. During both the evening and the morning services, the Torah scrolls are removed from the Aron Kodesh and paraded around the Sanctuary in festive processions of song and dance. Everyone in attendance is encouraged to carry a scroll and share the joy of Torah. An effort is also made to ensure that everyone in attendance is called to the Torah for an Aliyah. Here at CAI, Simhat Torah has always been a fun time for all. The children watch in awe as their parents teach them love of Torah, and the parents glow as their children extend that love into the next generation.