

SUKKOS

Holiday of Sukkot

1
**What is
Sukkos?**

2
The Sukkah

3
**Arba Minim –
the Four Species**

4
**Chol Hamoed &
Hoshana Rabbah**

What is Sukkos?



In a Nutshell

Sukkos is a 7 day Yom Tov commemorating the Jewish nation's miraculous journey in the desert after leaving Egypt. We eat and live in temporary structures called sukkahs and perform the mitzvah of Arbah Minim (taking of the Four Species). Shemini Atzeres directly follows this holiday on days 8 and 9.

3 in 1

Sukkos isn't just called Sukkos. This wonderful yom tov has three different names, and each adds another layer of meaning. There's "Sukkos" itself, because of the mitzvah of building and living in a Sukkah. Then there's "Chag Ha'asif," which means the holiday of harvest/gathering, because that is when the harvest took place, and it is also part of the reason we celebrate Sukkos - to thank Hashem for His bounty. Finally, it's called "Zman Simchaseinu," because this is the happiest time of year, as we were just forgiven for our sins on Yom Kippur and achieved new heights in our closeness to Hashem.

Climate Controlled Desert

We are commanded to sit in a sukkah for seven days, starting from the 15th of Tishrei, to remember that Hashem settled us in "sukkos" when we left Mitzrayim¹. What were these "sukkos"? The first explanation is that as we were traveling through the desert, Hashem surrounded us with *ananei hakavod* - miraculous clouds of glory² that surrounded us on all sides, protecting us from wild animals and other dangers. The clouds ensured the climate was always perfect and protected us from the elements, even smoothing out the terrain in front of us, as well as many other miracles. Some say the clouds carried the Jews as they traveled, so they didn't have to walk!³ The second opinion is that these "sukkos" refer to simple huts we lived in while in the desert, and that we are reinstating the trust we placed in Hashem then, relying only on Hashem's protection.

Harvest Happy

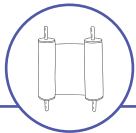
Sukkos is a time when people are naturally happy, because it's the time of harvest, when farmers have brought in the grain and fruit. Hashem gives us the opportunity to channel our happiness into something far more meaningful than our crops: service of Hashem. We turn our joy into something spiritual that we will be rewarded for.⁴

Sitting in our Sukkah, we contrast all the blessings and abundance we have today, represented by the new harvest, to our primitive existence in the desert, where we spent 40 years without a sturdy roof over our heads. This contrast helps us feel an increased appreciation for Hashem's blessings.⁵ Furthermore, since during the time of harvest it's easy for people to get too involved in their material success, the Sukkah, representing the temporary huts we lived in while on our journey to Eretz Yisrael, reminds us that this world is temporary and not to be distracted by our wealth or let it get to our heads, as everything is from Hashem.⁶



Why Seven Days?

One of several reasons Sukkos is seven days long is to correspond to the seven clouds of glory that surrounded the Jewish people in the desert: above, underneath, and on all four sides, plus one in front leading the way.⁷ Another reason is that this time of harvest is an opportunity to thank Hashem for each of the seven crops that Eretz Yisrael is blessed with, known as the *shivas haminim*. We are given one day each to focus on and properly thank Hashem for that crop. We learn from here that the correct way to thank Hashem for our blessings is not to simply say, "thank You for everything," but to thank Hashem for every gift He gives us independently. This helps us realize the extent of Hashem's kindness, which brings us closer to Him.⁸



Why is Sukkos not in Nissan?

At first glance, the placement of Sukkos in the month of Tishrei is puzzling. If we are commemorating the *ananei hakavod* that protected the Jewish people during their journey through the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt, why is it not celebrated in Nissan, the month we left Egypt?

One classic answer is offered by the Tur,⁹ who explains that a sukkah built in the spring, when the weather is naturally pleasant and many people enjoy spending more time outdoors, wouldn't make a statement. But in Tishrei, when the air turns cool and rain threatens and people start returning to their insulated homes, stepping outside to live in a flimsy, temporary hut becomes a deliberate act. It becomes clear that we're not just camping out for fun; we're fulfilling a mitzvah and publicizing the miracle this Yom Tov commemorates.

The Ramban¹⁰ adds a deeper insight. In Nissan, when we celebrate *Yetzias Mitzrayim* at the time it occurred, we internalize its message that Hashem runs the world. But that was only the beginning. Half a year later, Sukkos reminds us that Hashem's care didn't end there; He continued to guide and protect us, sheltering us with the Clouds of Glory. Sukkos reinforces our belief that Hashem runs the world and is always there for us, no matter the time or season.

The Vilna Gaon¹¹ goes further, pointing out that while the Jews received the *ananei hakavod* in Nissan, they lost them after the *cheit haegel* (sin of the golden calf) and it wasn't until the 15th of Tishrei that they returned. Sukkos, then, doesn't just commemorate Divine protection; it celebrates reconciliation. A relationship that survived a fallout and was restored is stronger than one that was never tested. Sukkos in Tishrei represents our relationship with Hashem enduring a rupture and rebuilding, reconnection. After having lost them once, the Jews appreciated the *ananei hakavod* even more.

This theme of renewal after forgiveness continues in the explanation of the Aruch Hashulchan,¹² who sees the sukkah as a natural continuation of the High Holiday season. Before Yom Kippur, we stayed in the safety of our homes, afraid of being harmed as

a result of our sins. After Yom Kippur, having gone through the process of repentance, cleansed and forgiven, we step confidently into the sukkah, into Hashem's embrace.¹³

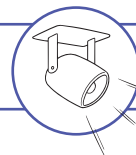
Yet Sukkos is not only about the past. It also shapes how we confront the present. As the Yalkut Shimoni¹⁴ notes, in case it was decreed on Yom Kippur that we deserve to be exiled, voluntarily leaving our homes to fulfill the mitzvah of sukkah serves as a substitute for that harsh punishment. It's a gentle exile, turning Divine judgment into compassion.

Sukkos also appropriately wraps up the Yamim Noraim season because Hoshana Rabbah is when the decree of Yom Kippur is finalized. Thus we are given a final chance on Sukkos, a time of joy, to repent out of love.¹⁵

All this is besides the lessons of Sukkos being during the harvest season, when we can easily be intoxicated by our material success, as explained by the Chizkuni¹⁶ and Kli Yakar.¹⁷ Arrogance born of abundance can lead to forgetfulness of Hashem. The sukkah resets our perspective, reminding us that, just like our ancestors in the desert, we are totally dependent on Him.

In this light, Sukkos in Tishrei is exactly where it belongs: after the spiritual renewal of the Days of Awe, just as the season turns, just as the harvest arrives. It invites us to declare our faith openly, remember Hashem's enduring presence, rebuild our connection after failure, humble ourselves at the height of success, and return to Him with joy. The sukkah may be a temporary dwelling—but the lessons it holds are timeless.

Would you want Sukkos to fall out in the springtime? What would be different if it did?



Spotlight

The makeshift sukkah reminds us that this physical world is temporary and only Hashem and His Torah are the ultimate reality.⁹



The Sukkah



Small but Mighty

The sukkah may be small and flimsy, but it has huge spiritual power, offering powerful protection and bringing great reward.²⁵ This mitzvah, which is said to be equal to keeping all the *mitzvos*, trains us to focus on what really matters in this world: not fancy houses or luxury cars, but trusting in Hashem and serving Him.²⁶

Living the Sukkah Life

The sukkah is like your home for Sukkos, so you should eat, drink, spend time and even sleep in the sukkah just like you would at home. Because of its holiness, the sukkah must be treated with respect, so garbage and dirty dishes should not be left lying around.²⁷

When sitting in the sukkah, have in mind that you are doing the mitzvah and think about how Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim and protected us with clouds of glory.

You should try to do most of your eating and drinking in the sukkah, when possible. On the first night (and second, outside of Israel), it's especially important to eat a certain amount of bread in the sukkah.²⁸ In general, the obligation of staying in the sukkah doesn't apply in cases of discomfort, such as rain, extreme heat or cold.²⁹

As a time-bound mitzvah, women are not obligated in the requirements of sukkah, though they certainly receive a mitzvah when they do so.³⁰

If you don't have easy access to a sukkah, consult a rabbi for guidance. (Oorah may be able to help you get a sukkah! Reach out to TheZone staff or your TorahMates coordinator for details.)

What bracha do I make on the Sukkah?

The *bracha* to recite before eating a minimum volume of bread in the Sukkah is

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לֵישֵׁב בַּסֻּכָּה.

We don't make a *bracha* just on sitting in the sukkah without eating.³¹

Build It Right!

When should you build the Sukkah?

If possible, you should start building the Sukkah immediately after Yom Kippur; some people have the custom to get started already before Yom Kippur.¹⁸

Where should you build a Sukkah?

The sukkah must be built directly under the sky, with no roof, awning, tree or other obstruction above it.¹⁹

How should you build the Sukkah?

The sukkah should preferably have at least three complete walls, but under certain circumstances, two plus walls are sufficient.²⁰ The walls may be made from almost any material as long as they are sturdy enough to stand for seven days in normal weather.²¹

What makes kosher s'chach?

The top of the sukkah is no ordinary roof! The s'chach covering the sukkah must be made of something that grows from the ground, is no longer attached to the ground, and is not susceptible to ritual impurity.²² Most people today use bamboo, evergreen branches, or special s'chach mats. Most people use wooden beams to support the s'chach instead of placing it directly on a metal frame because it's preferable for s'chach to be supported by something kosher for s'chach.²³ There must be more s'chach than air space across the roof, but placed loosely enough to allow rain, and preferably some sunlight, to penetrate.²⁴

VIP Guests!

There's more going on in your Sukkah than meets the eye. Did you know that each meal, one of seven heavenly guests, known as *ushpizin*, visits your sukkah?³² They are none other than our forefathers³³, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Yosef, and David.

Some have the custom to recite a special invitation to the *ushpizin* upon entering the Sukkah each day to welcome these special guests.

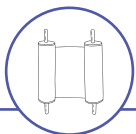


Torah Challenge

The gematria (numerical value) of two of Hashem's names together (26+65) equals 91, the same value as the word sukkah.

5 = ה 20 = כ 6 = ו 60 = ע

What does this hint to us about the special protection of the sukkah? ³⁴



The 'What's In It For Me' Attitude

A fascinating passage from the Gemara³⁵ describes a future scene when Mashiach arrives and Hashem prepares to reward the Jewish people for their faithful adherence to the Torah. The other nations protest, claiming they too deserve reward. After an extended dialogue, they request another opportunity to accept and observe the Torah. Though the time for such acceptance has passed, Hashem agrees to give them one final test.

The test is the mitzvah of sukkah, called an "easy" commandment. The nations eagerly build their sukkahs, confident they will succeed. But Hashem then makes the weather unbearably hot. Instead of enduring with patience or leaving respectfully, they kick their sukkahs in disgust and storm away, declaring they have had enough of *mitzvos*.

The Gemara anticipates an obvious objection to this scenario: if halacha exempts one from the sukkah in truly unpleasant conditions, why should the nations be judged harshly for their reaction?

The answer lies not in their leaving, but in their attitude. When Jews are exempt, they leave reluctantly, disappointed to miss the mitzvah. The nations' violent rejection shows their motivation was self-interest, conditional on comfort and reward.

This stark contrast reveals a fundamental truth about Jewish devotion that has sustained our people through countless hardships. Jews approach *mitzvos* not with a calculating

"what's in it for me" mentality, but with genuine appreciation for the opportunity to serve Hashem. Each commandment is viewed as a precious gift, a chance to connect with Hashem and fulfill our purpose in creation. When we cannot perform a mitzvah, our response should be disappointment, not relief. Such moments call for introspection and renewed commitment, humbled by the possibility that Hashem is displeased with our previous performance of the mitzvah.

This attitude also demands that we treat *mitzvos* and their associated objects with appropriate respect. Just as we would carefully preserve a gift from someone we love, the *mitzvos* deserve the same reverence. The Mishnah Berurah³⁶ notes that even after Sukkos concludes, we should not trample on Sukkah boards or treat them disrespectfully.³⁷

The profound message of this Gemara resonates through Jewish history and explains our people's remarkable resilience. When *mitzvos* have been forbidden by oppressive regimes, Jews have risked their lives to observe them. When observance has meant economic hardship or social ostracism, Jews have chosen faithfulness over convenience. This is not because Jews are inherently more virtuous than others, but because we have internalized the understanding that *mitzvos* are precious opportunities to serve Hashem, not burdens to be cast aside when they become inconvenient. By cultivating this attitude of treasuring *mitzvos*, we demonstrate our love for Hashem and our desire to draw close to Him. We show that our service stems from genuine devotion rather than calculated self-interest. In doing so, we honor the legacy of our ancestors and ensure that future generations will continue to find meaning and joy in Judaism, regardless of external circumstances.

Where would you rather eat your meal the first night of Sukkos: in your air conditioned/heated dining room or outside in the sukkah?



Tefillah Time

וּפְרוּשׁ עָלֵינוּ סֶכֶת שְׁלוֹמֶךָ

"And spread over us the sukkah of Your peace"
(Hashkivenu in Maariv and Krias Shema al hamitah).

Every night we ask Hashem to surround us with His "Sukkah of peace." On Sukkos, this tefillah comes alive in the most literal way. The Sukkah's thin walls and leafy roof remind us that true protection doesn't come from bricks and locks, but from Hashem constantly surrounding us with His impenetrable protection. Sitting beneath the s'chach, we reinforce the knowledge that Hashem's embrace, His "Sukkah", is always around us, even after Sukkos ends.



Corny Corner

How do you know if your sukkah is too small?

When you sneeze and the whole thing shakes
like a lulav!

Arba Minim – the Four Species

What are the Arba Minim/Four Species?

We are commanded to take 4 special species together and shake them each day of Sukkos, except Shabbos. The commentaries compare each of the four species to a part of the human body, all intended to serve G-d.



ESROG
אתרוג

The esrog is a citron, characterized by its unique fragrance and thick, bumpy skin. It represents the heart.



LULAV
לולב

The lulav is a green, straight palm branch. The lulav represents the spine.



HADASSIM
הדסים

The hadassim are three leafy myrtle branches. The hadassim represent the eyes.



ARAVOS
ערבות

The aravos are two long, green willow branches with narrow leaves. The aravos represent the lips.

There are many details about the conditions these species need to be in to meet halachic specifications– it's a good idea to have a rabbi check your set to make sure they're kosher.

Shake It Till You Make It!

The *arba minim* set you use the first day (or two, outside of Israel) must belong to you. If you're sharing yours with someone else, give it as a gift on condition it is returned, rather than on loan.

Pick up the lulav in your right hand (left hand for Ashkenazi lefties), with the solid, dark green side of the spine facing you.

Ensure the *hadassim* are on the right and the *aravos* on the left.

Pick up the esrog in your other hand, holding it upside down.

Say the bracha of *al netilas lulav* and, on the first day, *Shehechyanu*.

After the bracha, turn the *esrog* right side up and shake in all directions - three times each for the front, right, back, left, up, and down. (the exact order varies by custom)

One may only shake during the day, between sunrise and sunset.³⁹ We shake the lulav in all directions to show that everything comes from Hashem.⁴⁰ It also protects us from all sides and shows that we overcame the accusing angels on Yom HaDin.⁴¹ Even though shaking is not the core part of the mitzvah, the Gemara says it shows how even the "extra pieces" of a mitzvah can have deep power.⁴²

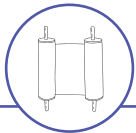
Four Types, One Team

Each of the four species represents a different type of Jew. The *esrog* smells and tastes good, like someone who learns Torah and also does *mitzvos*. The *lulav* has tasty fruit (it's a branch from the palm tree, which produce dates) but no smell, like someone who learns Torah but doesn't do many good deeds. The *hadassim* smells good but has no fruit, like someone with many good deeds but little Torah learning. The *aravah* has neither a good taste nor fragrance, representing Jews with no visible merits. You might think Hashem would want to leave out the aravah, but the Midrash says that Hashem insists we tie them all together.³⁸ Why? Because unity brings forgiveness. When we join together, learn from each other and value peace, we all rise and Hashem's presence comes to rest among us. We see this same idea brought out with public fasts, as a public fast is only effective when the sinners join in, too. In fact, the *ketores* (sweet-smelling spice offering) in the Bais Hamikdash contained a foul-smelling spice, called *chelbona*, to show how even someone who seems spiritually "off" is part of the beauty of a united Jewish nation.



Did You Know?

We don't shake the lulav and esrog on Shabbos.



The Depth in the Quartet

When you walk into shul on Sukkos morning and see everyone waving their lulav and esrog, it might look like a simple ritual: it's just four plants being shaken together in different directions. But beneath this mitzvah lies a treasure trove of meaning.

The Torah calls Sukkos "the first day" rather than the fifteenth of Tishrei, which seems odd at first. The Midrash explains this with a powerful parable, which also explains why specifically these four species are used for the mitzvah, instead of, say, a strawberry, cucumber, tomato and apple.

Imagine a city that rebelled against its king. As the king approached with his army, the city sent three separate delegations to plead for mercy. After the third delegation, the king declared he would give them a clean slate but warned that from now on, there would be a new accounting system.⁴³

This mirrors our spiritual journey through the Yamim Noraim, High Holy Days. Some people, the righteous ones symbolized by the beautiful esrog, repent before Rosh Hashanah and are forgiven then. Others, the average folk represented by the lulav and hadassim, take advantage of the Aseres Yimei Teshuva, the ten days of repentance between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and are forgiven then. The aravos represent the wicked people, who only finally repent and receive forgiveness on Yom Kippur itself. By Sukkos, we've all been

forgiven and Hashem announces a fresh start. The "first day" represents the beginning of our new spiritual accounting period.⁴⁴

The physical characteristics of each species carry profound symbolism too. The lulav represents our spine, which is the core of all action, as evidenced by spinal injuries causing paralysis. The hadas leaves resemble eyes, symbolizing sight. The aravah leaves look like lips, representing speech. The esrog resembles the heart, symbolizing our emotions. Together, they represent our complete service to Hashem through thoughts, actions, speech, and sight.⁴⁵ The *Chinuch* adds that since our outward actions affect our inner state, physically holding and shaking these symbolic items actually helps us behave properly.

The mystical dimension adds further depth. Each species represents a different letter of Hashem's four-letter name. This is why we must hold all four together, with the esrog touching the other three, so we don't symbolically "split" Hashem's name.⁴⁶ Some say they represent our forefathers, plus Yosef, or the four matriarchs, connecting us to their spiritual merits.⁴⁷

There's even a practical agricultural connection. During Sukkos, we're judged regarding the water we'll receive throughout the year. Since all four species require abundant water to grow, performing this mitzvah helps us merit adequate rainfall.⁴⁸

When you hold your lulav and esrog, don't just go through the motions. Try to have in mind what this mitzvah represents: forgiveness, unity, personal growth, mystical connection, and agricultural blessing.

Which of the four species are you?

Not Just Plants

On the surface, the *arba minim* look like some leaves, a fruit, and a stick, but Chazal reveal that these 'simple' items are bursting with power. The *arba minim* have the ability to awaken Hashem's mercy, bring forgiveness, and cause the Shechinah to rest among us.⁴⁹ In fact, the merit of this mitzvah is so great that it helps bring Mashiach.⁵⁰

Before they left Egypt, the Jews were commanded to use a blade of cheap hyssop to sprinkle blood on their doorposts. For this inexpensive, easy mitzvah, they were rewarded with freedom, riches, and eventually the entire land of Israel. If such reward came from hyssop, how much more so for the four species which can be quite expensive!⁵¹



Did You Know?

The lulav, hadassim and aravos are bound together, customarily with lulav fronds. At least 3-4 inches of the spine of the lulav should be left untied and visible above the tips of the hadassim and aravos. The esrog is held separately, but touching.



Chol Hamoed and Hoshana Rabbah

Chol Hamoed

After the first day (or two, outside of Israel) of Yom Tov come the intermediate days of Sukkos, *chol hamoed*, literally the 'weekday of the holiday.' These days are not like regular weekdays but also don't have the full status or work restrictions of Yom Tov. You should wear nicer clothing and eat better food than usual.⁵⁴ These days have their own special greeting – *gut moed* or *moadim l'simcha*. Ideally, these days should not be spent on business as usual, but on enjoying the holiday with family, mentors, spiritual rejuvenation and enjoyable activities. The detailed laws of what you're allowed and not allowed to do are complex and beyond the scope of this work – speak to your rabbi for personal guidance.

There are 6 days of *chol hamoed* in Israel, and 5 outside of Israel. When one of these days is Shabbos, we call it "Shabbos Chol Hamoed;" the davening is like a regular Shabbos but with the same additions we add for *chol hamoed*: *yaaleh v'yavo* in *Shemoneh Esrei*, Hallel, and *hoshanos*. Like the rest of *chol hamoed*, we say a special Mussaf *Shemoneh Esrei* for the Shabbos of Sukkos. We also read the megillah of Koheles, whose message teaches us to channel the joy of Sukkos properly in the service of Hashem rather than indulging in pointless pleasures.⁵⁵

Simchas Bais Hashoeva

On Sukkos in the Bais Hamikdash, there was a mitzvah to pour water on the *mizbeach* (altar), as the coming year's water supply is judged during this time. The Rabbis say this should be done with joy. The accompanying celebration, called *simchas bais hashoeva*, was so great that the Gemara says one who never saw it never experienced true happiness.⁵² The joyous holiness was such that some people there reached levels of prophecy or *ruach hakodesh*.⁵³ Today, many communities (including Oorah!) hold *Simchas Bais Hashoeva* celebrations to remember that joy and holiness.

Branches Around The Bimah

In the Bais Hamikdash, there was a mitzvah on Sukkos to circle the *mizbeach* (altar) with aravos, or *arba minim* (except on Shabbos) while praying for Hashem's help.⁵⁶ Today, we recreate that in shul every day of Sukkos with a unique part of davening called *Hoshanos*. We walk around the *bimah* with our *arba minim* while reciting special prayers asking Hashem to save us in His merit and in the merit of the Torah. Each day a different *hoshana* is said.⁵⁷ On Hoshana Rabbah, extra *hoshanos* are said; after circling the *bimah* seven times, we put down the *arba minim* and say more *tefillos* holding five *aravos* branches, which we hit on the ground at the conclusion of this part of the service. There is deep mystical significance to every aspect of this ritual.



Hoshana Rabbah

Hoshana Rabbah, literally "the great hoshana," is the last day of *chol hamoed* and is marked by more *hoshanos* than any other day of Sukkos.⁵⁸ We circle around the *bimah* seven times, instead of just once like the other days, recalling the Jewish people circling the city of Yericho seven times before its walls fell. With each circle, we weaken the prosecuting angels.⁵⁹

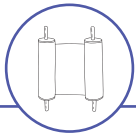
The word *Rabbah* also hints to the greatness and importance of the day, our longer *tefillos* reflecting that it's a day filled with extra potential for blessing. Some people have the custom to stay up learning Torah the night before and to eat a Yom Tov-style meal with kreplach, pockets of dough filled with meat, which hints that this day is a kind of hidden Yom Tov.⁶⁰



Did You Know?

The custom to decorate the sukkah with beautiful decorations dates back to at least the times of the Mishnah, and shows how precious this special mitzvah is to us.⁶¹





Make Room for the Treasures

Hoshana Rabbah, the seventh day of Sukkos, a day replete with deep spiritual meaning, is the closing chapter of the High Holiday season. On Rosh Hashana, our judgment is written. On Yom Kippur, it is sealed. But our Sages teach that on Hoshana Rabbah the verdict is finally “delivered.”⁶² This means the heavenly decision for the year is not fully set until this day. Hashem, in His great kindness, gives us one more chance to pray, to change, and to sweeten what might have been a harsh decree.

This day is also when Hashem decides how much rain will fall in the coming year.⁶³ Rain is life: it brings food, sustenance, and blessing to the entire world. So the prayers of Hoshana Rabbah are not only about our personal lives, but about the well-being of all creation.

Interestingly, the significance of Hoshana Rabbah as the final day of judgment is not written about in the Torah and Talmud. This idea is mainly taught in the Zohar and later kabbalistic works. Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky explained that in earlier times, people took judgment so seriously that if they knew the power of the day, it would have been hard for them to maintain the proper joy we should feel on Sukkos. So this truth was hidden and shared only with select individuals. In later generations, when people were no longer as shaken by the thought of Heavenly judgment, this teaching became more widely known to allow people to take advantage of the power of the day and put more effort into their prayers.⁶⁴

The Parable of the Suitcase

There once lived a poor man named Yaakov. His family had no food, their clothes were in tatters, and their firewood was gone. At his wife's urging, he set out for the big city to seek his fortune. With a small suitcase of meager belongings, he began the long journey on foot.

One night, deep in a forest, Yaakov found a cave to sleep in. At dawn, he awoke to find a hidden stash of stolen treasures - gold, silver, diamonds - enough to support his family for generations. But when he thought about taking them, he realized his suitcase was already full of his few clothes and food. Unwilling to part with them, he left the treasure behind and walked on.

How foolish! With that wealth, he could have bought a hundred times what he owned. His unwillingness to let go of the familiar cost him a completely transformed future.

This is our spiritual state as we approach Hoshana Rabbah. Hashem is ready to pour into our lives blessings of health, success, meaningful relationships, and closeness to Him. The heavenly storehouses are overflowing. But our “spiritual suitcases” are crammed with worthless habits, attitudes, and wasted time—scrolling endlessly online, nursing grudges, settling for mediocrity in our connection to Torah and *mitzvos*.

Like Yaakov clinging to his threadbare belongings, we hold onto what is familiar rather than clearing space for treasures.

Hoshana Rabbah is our last chance to unpack the suitcase. This is the day to take a hard, honest look at our lives and ask: *What needs to go so Hashem's blessings can come in?* It's time to let go of negative thinking, wasted hours, superficial relationships and spiritual laziness.

Though not a *yom tov* in the formal halachic sense, Hoshana Rabbah bears many similarities to the Yamim Noraim in tone and practice.⁶⁵ It's the 21st of Tishrei, the day Hashem seals His decree for us for the year; 21 squared (441) is the gematria (numerical value) of the word “emes,” truth, which is Hashem's seal.⁶⁶ Many have the custom to stay up the night before Hoshana Rabbah, preparing for a morning of intense prayer with hours of Torah learning. We circle the *bima* seven times, breaking down the barriers between us and Hashem, as we cry out to Him “*hoshana* - please save us!” Then we strike our bundle of *aravos* on the ground, the falling leaves reminding us to let go of pride and mistakes, to cultivate humility and repent.⁶⁷

The time for half-measures has passed. If we empty our spiritual suitcases, Hashem will fill them with treasures beyond imagination. This is not just another day of Sukkos; it is the moment when the gates are closing, and our Father in Heaven waits to see if we will make space for His blessing.⁶⁸



What's taking up space in your spiritual suitcase that doesn't need to be?

Zoniac Zone



Awakened by TheZone

Everyone who attended TheZone for Yom Tov returned inspired and uplifted. Dovid, however, was skeptical about his upcoming Sukkos trip. His son, who had volunteered there over the summer, was eager for his parents to experience the camp's unique spirit. But Dovid, a typical middle-aged frum man, doubted anything could move him deeply. He prepared himself for a Yom Tov like any other.

Two days in, Dovid felt vindicated. The food had been delicious, the speeches interesting, and the activities pleasant, yet he was still waiting for that elusive spark of inspiration. Watching the other guests, many new to Yiddishkeit and brimming with wonder, he felt a twinge of envy. For them, every mitzvah was fresh and exciting. For Dovid, a lifetime of routine had dulled that thrill. True inspiration felt like a shadow he could never quite grasp.

It was the last day of Yom Tov and the shul was beginning hoshanos. Lost in his thoughts, Dovid suddenly heard a high, sweet voice cut through the murmurs of davening. He scanned the rows and spotted a boy, no more than eleven or twelve, wearing a TheZone yarmulka that barely stayed atop his shaggy hair. The boy clutched his lulav and esrog with tender devotion, swaying with his eyes closed and softly humming a tune. He clearly did not know the words, yet his voice was steeped in pure emotion.

As the minyan chanted each hoshana, that soft humming rippled through the room and into

Dovid's heart. A single tear rolled down his cheek, then another. Soon, he was weeping into his tallis, years of pent-up emotion pouring out. This boy, so new to Yiddishkeit he did not even know the tefillos, had pierced his soul with simple, sincere love for Hashem.

That evening, the dining hall filled with attendees reflecting on the holiday. Guests spoke of thought-provoking discussions, heartfelt davening, and meaningful TorahMate sessions. Dovid, not usually one to speak publicly, felt compelled to share his story. He recounted the famed tale of the Baal Shem Tov and the shepherd boy who could only recite the alef bais, whose pure prayer soared above the words of the learned chassidim. Voice trembling, he described his own reawakening, sparked by the soft, heartfelt humming of a child.

As Dovid sat down, a man across the room rose, visibly moved. "This is my first Oorah Yom Tov," he said, "and my first time celebrating Sukkos. Dovid, your words meant so much to me because that boy you described was sitting next to me. He is my son, and I could not be more proud of him."

Dovid turned to the man, eyes brimming. He reached out to embrace him, no longer trying to hide his tears. In that moment, Dovid realized he had found the inspiration he thought he had lost, not through speeches or programs but through the pure, unfiltered song of a child discovering the beauty of serving Hashem.



Zoniac Dilemma

Jacob had been to TheZone for Sukkos the year before, where he'd experienced the unparalleled joy of Sukkos for the very first time. This year, he would be home, and he badly wanted to share the wonderful experience of Sukkos with his family in a completely kosher way. As Sukkos approached, Jacob tried to explain to his family what Sukkos was all about.

A few days before Sukkos, Jacob woke up to a surprise. Looking out of his window, he saw that his Dad had built an entire sukkah while he'd been asleep! Thrilled, Jacob bounded down the steps to check out the sukkah, but upon inspection, his heart sank. Dad had clearly wanted to make a nice surprise for Jacob but he'd never

been fortunate enough to learn the halachos of building a sukkah. In place of s'chach, his father had covered the sukkah with an old tin board, and to add insult to injury, the sukkah stood directly beneath their neighbor's porch, making it halachically useless.

Just as Jacob was thinking gloomily about what he could do to save the situation, his Dad walked into the yard.

"How d'you like it, son? I was up till 3 in the morning building that! Isn't it a beauty!"

Jacob bit his lip and tried to look happy. He was so grateful for his father's efforts, but this was not a kosher sukkah by any stretch. If he wanted to make the bracha of 'lesheiv basukkah', he'd have to somehow recreate this sukkah without hurting his father's feelings.

How should Jacob go about this?



Happy in a Flimsy Hut

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi, Book 2 pg.284

Sukkos is called “Zeman Simchaseinu — the Time of our Joy.” But how can I rejoice when I have to leave the conveniences and comforts of my home and move into a hut, where I am exposed to the elements and have to run into the house every time it rains?

Your question is based on a misunderstanding of the true meaning of joy. In fact, dwelling in the Sukkah should not diminish your happiness, but actually fill you with great joy. As you spend a week in the flimsy Sukkah and internalize its message, you will hopefully rethink your values and become filled with joy. Many people walk around with the mistaken belief that happiness is attained through physical comfort and pleasure. But in truth, material pleasures are fleeting, and can never provide a person with true happiness. As the Mesillas Yesharim writes, only connecting to Hashem brings true and lasting happiness, the greatest pleasure attainable, because Hashem is the Source and the highest degree of goodness and pleasure. The flimsy structure of the Sukkah is a declaration that our dwelling places in this world are only temporary, and our focus is on spirituality and connecting to Hashem, not on material comfort. This is why we read the Book of Koheles, which describes the futility of this world, on Sukkos: because only one who rises above the frivolities of this world can be truly joyful. Indeed, this is why Sukkos is celebrated right after Yom Kippur. Our rabbis (Taanis 30b) tell us, Yom Kippur is one of the happiest days of the year, the day we receive the greatest gift possible — atonement for our sins and purification of our soul. Sin prevents us from connecting to Hashem, and through teshuvah — repentance — we remove these barriers, enabling us to renew our connection. In this newfound state of purity, Hashem invites us to join Him in the Sukkah, His home, free of all physical distractions, making Sukkos the ultimate “time of our joy.” This brings us to another aspect of the joy of Sukkah.

The Sukkah is a reminder of the “Sukkos” with which Hashem sheltered us in the Wilderness. The Talmud (Sukkah 11b) tells us that these “Sukkos” refer to either the Ananei Hakovod — Clouds of Glory — or the physical huts Hashem provided for us to protect us. Every year we commemorate this special protection from Hashem, and are reminded that He continues to protect us at all times. Living with the realization that we are always under the personal care of Hashem should infuse a person with great joy. Even if the huts in the Wilderness were not an open miracle like the Clouds of Glory, commemorating them hammers home a very important lesson: As the commentators explain, building these huts and surviving in them for forty years in the desert was a clear manifestation of Hashem’s guiding Hand. By sitting in the Sukkah we are reminded that even our basic possessions come from Hashem and must not be taken for granted. Just as Hashem provided for us then, He continues to provide all of our needs, and without Him, we would have nothing. So, as we sit in the Sukkah, we must take a moment to appreciate the roof over our heads, and remember that Hashem continues to provide us. There is nothing more comforting and reassuring than living with this realization, and this brings great feelings of joy. After internalizing this message during the week of Sukkos, we are ready to return to our homes with a greater sense of gratitude to Hashem for providing us with a home to live in and enjoy.

IN SHORT: *The flimsy structure reminds us that true joy is only attained by connecting to Hashem, not through material comfort. The Sukkah also reminds us that Hashem watches over us and provides us with our needs at all times, infusing us with great joy.*



Zodiac Challenge

Unscramble these Sukkos words!

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| 1 Acshc | 3 Pinuzihs |
| 2 Naahohsh | 4 Sogre |



Daily Challenge

The sukkah we live in on Sukkos is symbolic of the ‘sukkah’ of Hashem’s protection that surrounds us always. Before you go to sleep tonight, remind yourself that you are constantly ensconced in Hashem’s protection.



Sources

- 1) Vayikra 23:42-43
- 2) Ibid
- 3) Chidah in Chomas Einach, Yalkut Me'am Loez in Emor
- 4) Malbim, Devarim 16:13; Oznaim Latorah, Devarim 16:13
- 5) Rashbam Vayikra 23:43
- 6) Yalkut Me'am Loez; Malbim Vayikra 23:43
- 7) Baal Haturim Vayikra 23:42
- 8) Oznaim Latorah Bamidbar 29:12
- 9) Shulchan Aruch O"C 625
- 10) Vayikra 23:43
- 11) Kol Eliyahu, Emor
- 12) Shulchan Aruch O"C 625:5
- 13) Yalkut Me'am Loez, Parshas Emor
- 14) Shulchan Aruch O"C 653, Pirkei D'Rav Kahana ch. 29
- 15) Oznaim Latorah Vayikrah 23:34
- 16) Vayikra 23:42
- 17) Ibid
- 18) Shaarei Teshuvah 625:1; Mishnah Berurah 625:2
- 19) Shulchan Aruch O"C 626-628
- 20) S.A., O"C, 630; Mishnah Berurah 630:5
- 21) Shulchan Aruch O"C 630
- 22) Ibid 629
- 23) S.A. O"C 629:14, 630:1; Mishnah Berurah 629:22
- 24) Shulchan Aruch O"C 631, Mishnah Berurah 631:6
- 25) Yalkut Shimon Emor 653
- 26) Darash Moshe Darash Moshe Chag Hasukos
- 27) Shulchan Aruch O"C 639:1-4
- 28) Ibid 2-3
- 29) Ibid 639-640
- 30) Shulchan Aruch O"C 640:1-2
- 31) S.A., O"C, 639:8, Mishnah Berurah 643
- 32) Zohar, Emor 103b
- 33) Ibid
- 34) Aruch Hashulchan 625:5
- 35) Avodah Zara 3a-3b
- 36) Shulchan Aruch O"C 638:24
- 37) Ibid 21, 154
- 38) Vayikra Rabba 30:12, Eitz Yosef
- 39) Shulchan Aruch O"C 652
- 40) Sukkah 37b-38a, Sefer HaChinuch Mitzvah 324
- 41) Avudraham chapter 27
- 42) Sukkah 37b-38a
- 43) Vayikra Raba 30:7; Tanchuma Emor 22
- 44) Vayikra Raba 30:7
- 45) Tanchuma Emor 19; Vayikrah Raba 30:14
- 46) S.A., O.C., 651:14 Taz
- 47) Vayikra Raba 30:10-11
- 48) Taanis 2b; Vayikra Raba 30:11
- 49) Vayikra Rabba 30:15
- 50) Ibid 30:16
- 51) Vayikra Rabba 30:1
- 52) Succah 50a-51b
- 53) Yerushalmi Succah 5:1
- 54) Aruch Hashulchan 530:4, Mishnah Berurah 530:1
- 55) Mateh Moshe 966
- 56) Sukkah 44a-44b
- 57) Aruch Hashulchan 660:1-2
- 58) Levush 664:1
- 59) Yalkut Me'am Loez Emor
- 60) Aruch Hashulchan 664:13
- 61) Shlah, Maseches Sukkah #4
- 62) Zohar Parshas Vayechi 220a
- 63) Shulchan Aruch 664
- 64) Emes L'Yaakov Vayikra 23:24
- 65) Shulchan Aruch 664; Aruch Hashulchan 664:13
- 66) Mateh Moshe 957
- 67) Yalkut Me'am Loez, Emor
- 68) TorahAnytime, Rabbi Shlomo Landau



Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



**Sukkot 101 –
An Oorah
Holiday Guide**

<https://www.torahmates.org/jewish-resources/10-minutes-to-a-better-sukkos/>



**The Jewish
Calendar and
Hoshana Rabbah**

<https://www.torahmates.org/jewish-resources/the-jewish-calendar-and-hoshana-rabbah/>



**Living Beyond
Time**
*By Rabbi
Pinchas Stolper*

SHEMINI ATZERES & SIMCHAS TORAH

Holidays at the end of Sukkot



1

What is
Yom Tov?

2

What is Shemini
Atzeres?

3

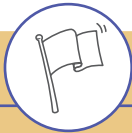
What is
Simchas
Torah?

What is Yom Tov?



In a Nutshell

Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah are the days of Yom Tov that immediately follow Sukkos. They are the culmination of the Yamim Noraim.



Just a Minute!

Before we dive into the Yom Tov of Shemini Atzeres, let's first get clear on what exactly Yom Tov is in general. How is it different from Shabbos and how is it similar? What are we supposed to focus on, and what is the Torah way to celebrate?

Hold fast...

Stop, Think, Celebrate!

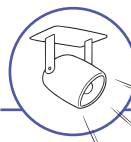
Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkos, these are the highlights of the Jewish calendar! What could be better than celebrating our heritage with family, sitting around the table enjoying good food, singing and sharing insights about the Yom Tov? When Yom Tov ends, we can hardly wait for the next one to begin!

But is Yom Tov all about eating nice food and relaxing, or is there more to it?

Well, those things are very important, but of course, there is a deeper aspect to the celebrations.

The main purpose of Yom Tov is to give us a chance to pause our busy lives and reflect on the incredible miracles Hashem performed for us and how He continues to care for us until this day.¹

Yom Tov is a time designated for Torah learning, especially learning the *halachos* and significance of that particular yom tov.² When we use these days for spiritual pursuits, learning and davening with joy, they become truly "Hashem's holidays," rather than just our own parties.³



Spotlight

Shemini Atzeres is a celebration of the close bond between Klal Yisrael, the Torah, and Hashem.

The Ultimate Celebration

On Yom Tov, we make kiddush, eat two delicious meals starting with lechem mishnah (two challahs), and wear our nicest clothes to show how special the day is.⁵ Honoring Yom Tov is so important that disgracing it is compared to serving idols.⁶

Yom Tov is supposed to be split equally between physical enjoyment and spiritual matters. Men, women, and children feel the joy of Yom Tov in different ways. Men derive joy from eating meat and drinking wine, women feel the joy by wearing new clothing or jewelry, and kids are happy when they get nosh and other treats. But our Yom Tov observance is only worthwhile to Hashem if we include others too. We should invite guests and give tzedakah so the poor can celebrate too. Our celebrations also shouldn't get silly or wild. The good food and nice clothes should help us feel happy, so we can thank Hashem and serve Him with joy.⁷

Remember Egypt!

Every Yom Tov is also "*Zeicher L'Yetzias Mitzrayim*", a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt, because that's when Hashem clearly showed He controls the world and pays attention to what's happening.⁴ By remembering Hashem's kindness, we feel grateful and grow closer to Him.



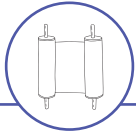
Torah Challenge

The "Zohar, *parshas Acharei Mos*, teaches

— "ישראל ואורייתא וקוב"ה חד הוא"

"Yisrael, the Torah, and Hashem are one."

If all three are inseparably united, how can this change our mindset when we learn Torah and do mitzvos?



Keeping Two Days of Yom Tov



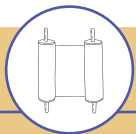
Outside Eretz Yisrael, we keep two days of Yom Tov instead of one, called Yom Tov sheini shel galuyos, the second day of Yom Tov of the Diaspora. The reason goes back to how the Jewish calendar was once determined.

In the times of the Bais Hamikdash, Rosh Chodesh, the new month, was determined based on witnesses testifying before Sanhedrin (the high Jewish court) that they saw the new moon. (A Jewish month can be either 29 or 30 days.) Since the dates of Yom Tov were dependent on the exact timing of the new month, it was crucial to know exactly which

day it started. Communities in Eretz Yisrael found out quickly, but people living further away did not always receive the message in time. To be sure they were celebrating on the correct day, Jews outside Eretz Yisrael observed two days of Yom Tov.

Even though we've since started using the set calendar established by Hillel Nisiya, removing this uncertainty, the rabbis required Jews outside Eretz Yisrael to continue keeping two days. They worried that in times of persecution, Jews might lose access to the calendar and keep the wrong day as Yom Tov.

If you moved to Israel, would you miss keeping a second day of Yom Tov?



Yom Tov vs. Shabbos

The Yom Tov day flows much like Shabbos, but with special touches! We light candles saying "lehadlik ner shel Yom Tov" instead of "Shabbos", unless it falls on Shabbos, in which case we say "lehadlik ner shel Shabbos v'Yom Tov. We generally also say the bracha of Shehecheyanu, thanking Hashem for allowing us to live to see this great day, except on the last day of Pesach. Men say this bracha at kiddush.

Kiddush and Yom Tov tefillos, in general, focus on thanking Hashem for choosing us as His nation and giving us this special day, rather than discussing creation, as on Shabbos.

Unlike Shabbos, which carries its inherent holiness every seventh day no matter what, the holiness of Yom Tov is dependent on our sanctification of it. Our Yom Tov tefillos end "mekadesh Yisrael v'hazemanim" - Hashem sanctifies the Jewish people, who in turn have the power to sanctify the festivals.

On Yom Tov morning, we sing Hallel after Shemoneh Esrei, singing Hashem's praises for past, present, and future miracles.⁸ We read special Torah portions connected to that Yom Tov, followed by Mussaf, the prayer corresponding to the additional *korban* brought on that Yom Tov, where we pray for the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash.

The Torah permits activities related to food preparation on Yom Tov. For this reason, activities like cooking and carrying without an eruv are permitted. This is why the Torah says "kol meleches avodah" (*burdensome work*) is forbidden, not "kol melacha" (*all work*) like on Shabbos.⁹

But there are limits: the pasuk says you may do this work "for yourselves," so no cooking for non-Jews or even pets.¹⁰ One also can't prepare for the next week or even Chol Hamoed, only for that day's needs.



Chosen Nation

אֲתָהּ בְּחַרְתָּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים
אֲהַבְתָּ אוֹתָנוּ וְרָצִיתָ בָּנוּ
וְרוֹמַמְתָּנוּ מִכָּל הַלְשׁוֹנוֹת x2

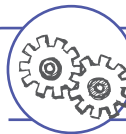
Chorus
We are, we are
The chosen nation
We are, we are
The chosen nation x2

וְקִדְשָׁתָנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ
וְקִבְּרָתָנוּ מִלְּכָנוּ לַעֲבוֹדָתְךָ x2

Chorus

וְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל
וְהַקְדוֹשׁ עָלֵינוּ קְרֵאתָ x4
אֲתָהּ בְּחַרְתָּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים
אֲהַבְתָּ אוֹתָנוּ וְרָצִיתָ בָּנוּ
וְרוֹמַמְתָּנוּ מִכָּל הַלְשׁוֹנוֹת x2

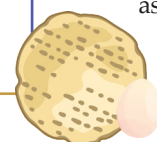
Chorus x2



Getting Practical

One also cannot cook for a Shabbos that immediately follows Yom Tov. To overcome this issue, we make an eruv tavshilin, which means taking a cooked food, typically a hard-boiled egg, and a loaf of bread or a piece of matzah, making the bracha on eruv tavshilin (see a siddur for precise instructions), and setting it aside for Shabbos. This enables you to cook on Yom Tov for Shabbos.¹¹

For detailed instructions scan here



What is Shemini Atzeres?

Why is it Called So?

Shemini means eighth, as in the 8th day of Sukkos; Atzeres means to stop. In the times of the Bais Hamikdash, the Jewish people made a pilgrimage to the Bais Hamikdash three times a year, on Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkos. This was an opportunity to soak up the holy atmosphere and learn from the Kohanim and Torah scholars who spent their lives serving Hashem. Yerushalayim was like the spiritual headquarters for all Jews, where they'd get inspired and pick up life lessons to carry them through until their next visit.

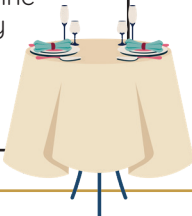
During the first days of Sukkos, everyone was super busy bringing different *korbanos*, but by Shemini Atzeres, the time for bringing these *korbanos* was over. This created the perfect moment to actually stop (Atzeres), hit pause on all the rushing around, and really focus on receiving guidance from the Kohanim and Sages.¹⁴

What is the Purpose?

The Midrash illustrates Shemini Atzeres through a royal parable. A king celebrated a joyous occasion, and his son hosted a magnificent seven-day celebration, graciously attending to all guests throughout the week. When the festivities concluded, the king approached his son with a heartfelt request: "I know you've been busy caring for the party and all our guests. Now I desire a private celebration for just the two of us. I won't burden you with elaborate preparations; I simply want to share a quiet meal together."

This parable reflects the spiritual reality of Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres. During the seven days of Sukkos in the Bais Hamikdash, we offered seventy bulls (along with other sacrifices) representing the seventy nations of the world, seeking forgiveness on their behalf so they wouldn't face destruction. But on Shemini Atzeres, Hashem declares, "Now it's just for the two of us." We bring only one bull and one ram, offered specifically for the Jewish people.¹²

When the Jewish people heard this Divine invitation for a private celebration, they burst into joyful praise, proclaiming: "This is the day Hashem made, let us rejoice and be happy with it!"¹³



Shemini Atzeres Specials

Because Shemini Atzeres comes right after Sukkos, we tend to think of it as the "second days" of Sukkos, just like Pesach starts and ends with Yom Tov days. But unlike the second days of Pesach, Shemini Atzeres is somewhat of its own Yom Tov. It's got both aspects to it: the "8th day of Sukkos" and a separate Yom Tov referred to in davening as Shemini Atzeres. Since it's partially its own Yom Tov, we make the bracha of Shehecheyanu when lighting candles and making kiddush.¹⁵

There's no mitzvah to sit in the sukkah on Shemini Atzeres, but outside of Eretz Yisrael, most people eat their meals in the sukkah (without making a bracha of *leishev basukkah*) since besides being Shemini Atzeres, it's also the second day of the last day of Sukkos.¹⁶

There's a beautiful custom to eat a little in the sukkah towards the end of Shemini Atzeres and say goodbye to the sukkah, showing how much we treasure the mitzvah. We recite a special tefillah before leaving for the last time.¹⁷

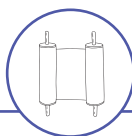
During mussaf, we start praising Hashem for rain, marking the beginning of Eretz Yisrael's rainy season.



Why No Sukkah or Arbah Minim?

Why don't we have the mitzvah of sukkah on Shemini Atzeres? The answer is pretty simple: so that our tefillah for rain will be wholehearted because we won't be worrying about how rain would interfere with sitting in the sukkah.¹⁸ During Sukkos, we're judged for rain and should ask for it, but we don't because it would interfere with the special mitzvah of sitting in the sukkah. So Hashem gave us Shemini Atzeres as a "makeup day" to focus completely on praying for rain.¹⁹

What about lulav and esrog? The four species remind us to use Sukkos joy properly and not abuse it. However, Shemini Atzeres is meant for spending exclusive time with Hashem, so we don't need that reminder.²⁰ Even outside Israel, we don't shake them because after the first day, it's only a rabbinical requirement to remember the Beis Hamikdash. Since Shemini Atzeres might not even be Sukkos, the rabbis didn't require it. Plus, openly treating it like Sukkos by shaking the lulav would detract from Shemini Atzeres' unique honor.²¹



Please Stay Another Day!

Shemini Atzeres isn't just an extra day tacked onto Sukkos. Shemini Atzeres reveals something powerful about Hashem's relationship with the Jewish people and what makes us unique as a nation.

The most famous explanation comes from Rashi, who compares it to a father who can't bear to say goodbye to his child.²² Just as the child is about to leave, the father says, "It's too hard for me to let you go, stay one more day." That's what Hashem says to us after Sukkos.

The Chizkuni takes this further with a story about a king whose son visits three times a year.²³ After the first two visits, when the son says he's leaving, the king asks when he'll be back. The first time, he says, "In 50 days," and the second time, he says, "In 4 months," and the king waves goodbye happily. But after the third visit, the son says he won't return for 6 months. Suddenly, the king can't handle it: "Six months?! Stay another day before you go."

This mirrors the three pilgrimage festivals. After Pesach and Shavuot, we would return to Yerushalayim pretty soon for the next Yom Tov. But after Sukkos? Winter was coming, making travel nearly impossible for half the year. So Hashem said, "I can't wait six months to see you again, stay one more day".²⁴

Furthermore, the point of going to the Bais Hamikdash was to get spiritually recharged for the rest of the year.²⁵ Since we'd be away the longest after Sukkos, we needed an extra spiritual boost to carry us through the winter.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin points out something we can all relate to. We take good things for granted until they're about to end. Think about the last day of summer vacation—suddenly you realize how awesome it was and wish it would never end. That's what happens as the High Holy Days and Sukkos wind down. We suddenly appreciate how incredible these days of closeness to Hashem are and don't want them to end. Shemini Atzeres is like Hashem saying, "Okay, one more day, but make it count!"²⁶

The day also highlights what makes Jews different from everyone else. A Midrash compares how different nations handle success versus how Jews do.²⁷ When powerful leaders like Pharaoh or Nevuchadnetzar became successful, they rebelled against Hashem. In contrast, when Jewish leaders like

David, Shlomo, or Daniel became successful, they praised Hashem even more.

The same pattern shows up in how we celebrate. Other nations throw wild parties and sin when they're happy. Jews eat, drink, and celebrate, then go to shul to daven, sing Hashem's praises, and learn Torah. We channel our happiness into serving Hashem. This is exactly why, after seven days of Sukkos (where we brought sacrifices for all 70 nations), Hashem wanted a special day to reward us. Hashem desires a day spent focusing only on our deep, meaningful connection to Him, without involving the non-Jews who cannot truly fathom this depth.

Another Midrash portrays us actually making this argument to Hashem.²⁸ We basically said, "Look at the difference between us and other nations. We use our good times to serve You better. So give us more Yamim Tovim so we can praise You even more!" And Hashem responded by giving us Shemini Atzeres.

There's also a deeper reason for Shemini Atzeres. Originally, Hashem wanted to give every spring/summer month its own festival: Nissan got Pesach, Iyar got Pesach Sheini, Sivan got Shavuot. But because of our sins, we lost the Yamim Tovim for Tamuz, Av, and Elul. So Tishrei had to make up for everyone: Rosh Hashana covered Tamuz, Yom Kippur covered Av, and Sukkos covered Elul. If Tishrei is making up for all the other months, it deserves its own as well, so Hashem gave it Shemini Atzeres.²⁹

All these explanations show that Shemini Atzeres isn't just a random extra day. There are many special reasons for it, with the main point being that Hashem says, "I don't want this special time to end," and we get to respond, "Neither do we!"

If we really believed that Hashem didn't want us to leave after Sukkos, would we live the rest of the year differently?



Tefillah Time

זֶה הַיּוֹם עָשָׂה ה' נִגִּילָה וְנִשְׂמָחָה בּוֹ

"This is the day that Hashem has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

This is a verse from Tehillim that we recite in Hallel. It powerfully captures the essence of Shemini Atzeres. After the intense spiritual journey of the High Holy Days and the joyous celebration of Succos, the final day - Shemini Atzeres - embodies this possuk which teaches us that just as Shemini Atzeres is a wonderful day, full of opportunities that Hashem gave us, so is every day a G-d-given gift that we should joyfully embrace.

What is Simchas Torah?

The Ultimate Joy

Simchas Torah, meaning “day of rejoicing over the Torah,” is the 9th day of Sukkos/the second day of Shemini Atzeres. In Eretz Yisrael, Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah are celebrated on the same day. Simchas Torah is called so because on this day we celebrate finishing a complete cycle of reading the entire Torah and rejoice over this accomplishment.³² It marks both an ending and a beginning, as we finish reading the final parsha of the Torah, *V’zos Habracha*, and immediately start the new cycle by beginning Bereishis. This continuous cycle shows that Torah learning never truly ends. The Yom Tov also represents the grand finale of the High Holy Days and Sukkos, celebrating that we have been forgiven.³³

Extraordinary Celebration

Simchas Torah is the pure joy of completing the Torah and the connection to Hashem that comes with that. Simchas Torah is a demonstration of our excitement and love for the Torah, and it shows that learning isn’t just an obligation but a source of tremendous happiness. The custom of dancing with the Torah scrolls, dating back over 1,000 years to the time of the Geonim, shows how much we love and honor the Torah.³⁰ There is a Midrash about King Shlomo, who made a party after receiving extraordinary wisdom from Hashem, teaching us to celebrate our Torah accomplishments just as Shlomo celebrated his gift of wisdom.³¹ Making a celebration on the completion of the Torah shows our gratitude to Hashem for giving us the ability to accomplish this milestone and display our love for Torah learning.

What Happens on Simchas Torah?

One of the most significant aspects of Simchas Torah is the *hakafos*, where we dance with all the shul’s Torah scrolls around the *bimah* seven times, just like on Hoshana Rabbah.³⁴ This happens both at night after Maariv and during the day after Shacharis, with special verses recited at the beginning of each circuit. During the *hakafos*, we sing joyous “Simchas Torah” songs expressing our love of the Torah and our good fortune of being Hashem’s chosen nation. Many shuls do not have separate dancing for women and girls, but watching the dancing is considered participating in the mitzvah and honoring the Torah. The *hakafos* end with the Torahs danced back into the aron kodesh to the singing of Se’u Shearim.³⁵



The Torah reading itself is special, with many communities reading the first few portions multiple times so everyone can receive an aliyah and actively participate. There’s a special aliyah called “*Kol Ne’arim*” (literally, all the youth) where children gather around the Torah, and afterwards we say or sing “*Hamalach Hagoel*,” the blessing Yaakov Avinu gave his grandchildren, with them.³⁶ Candy is distributed to children during *hakafos* to impress upon them the sweetness of Torah.

The final two *aliyos* are given special honor: the one who receives the *aliyah* that completes the whole Torah is called Chassan Torah (literally, groom of the Torah), and the one who begins the new cycle from Bereishis is called the Chassan Bereishis, with both traditionally hosting celebrations.³⁷



Corny Corner

Why do we start the Torah again right away on Simchas Torah?

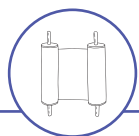
So no one complains, “But what happens next?”



Did You Know?

Some communities have the custom to leave lit candles in the aron kodesh when the sifrei Torah are removed.





Bringing the Inspiration Home

The Vilna Gaon in the fourth chapter of Shir Hashirim writes that Hashem gave us four gifts that have four corresponding Yamim Tovim.

1. Pesach corresponds to Yetzias Mitzrayim (the Exodus, when the Yidden left Egypt).
2. Shavuot corresponds to Kabbalas HaTorah, receiving the Torah.
3. Sukkot corresponds to the building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle)
4. Shemini Atzeres corresponds to our entering Eretz Yisrael.

What does Shemini Atzeres have to do with going into Eretz Yisrael? In the midbar, we lived a supernatural existence. We ate mann, were surrounded by the Divine protection of the *ananei hakavod*, and had no physical duties. We could learn Torah all day without a care in the world. Going into Eretz Yisrael, the goal was to live 'regular' lives, having to work the land to get sustenance, yet stay connected to Hashem at every moment.

Rav Chaim Mintz³⁸ compares the Yamim Tovim to the various stages of a wedding ceremony. Pesach is the *kiddushin*, putting the ring on the kallah's finger; Shavuot, when we received the Torah, corresponds to the chuppah. Sukkot is the *yichud* room, and Shemini Atzeres...is the rest of life. It's the day we take all the spirituality we built up from the Yamim Noraim and focus on how we can integrate it into our everyday lives. This is why Shemini Atzeres represents going into Eretz Yisrael. There is no lulav and esrog and no sukkah on Shemini Atzeres. It's just us and Hashem, a day to focus solely on sending ourselves into a year of growth.

The profound insight of Shemini Atzeres lies in its apparent simplicity. After weeks of intense spiritual activity: the soul-searching of Elul, the awe of Rosh Hashanah, the purification of Yom Kippur, and the joy of Sukkot, we arrive at a day that seems almost anticlimactic. No shofar, no arba minim, no special dwelling. Yet this apparent emptiness contains the deepest message of the entire season.



The challenge we face is not achieving moments of spiritual elevation; it's sustaining that connection when we return to our mundane routines. Anyone can feel inspired in shul on Yom Kippur or while shaking the lulav on Sukkot. But can we maintain our awareness of Hashem's presence and excitement for Torah and *mitzvos* when we go back to the daily grind?

This is precisely the lesson of entering Eretz Yisrael that Shemini Atzeres embodies. In the desert, spirituality was unavoidable. The Jewish people were surrounded by miracles, fed heavenly food, and protected by Divine clouds. But entering Eretz Yisrael required learning to find Hashem within the natural world, to discover holiness within the ordinary.

The transition from the desert to Eretz Yisrael mirrors our own transition from the heightened spirituality of Tishrei to the everyday challenges of the rest of the year. The Yamim Noraim offer a glimpse into our vast potential for greatness, but the strength of our connection to Hashem is tested by how successfully we carry the inspiration into the winter months.

Shemini Atzeres serves as our training ground for this integration. It's a day when we practice maintaining our elevated levels without external props. We learn to connect with Hashem not through ritual objects or special environments, but through the power of our *neshamos*.

Ultimately, Shemini Atzeres teaches us that inspiration isn't meant to be seasonal. The goal isn't to live eleven months in spiritual hibernation and wake up the following Elul. Instead, we're meant to discover that every day can be a Shemini Atzeres - a direct encounter with Hashem, sustained by the deep wells of connection we've built during our times of intensive spiritual focus. In this way, Shemini Atzeres becomes not just the conclusion of the holiday season, but the beginning of our real spiritual work: learning to live every day in the presence of Hashem.

If your best friend was moving to a new city and you had one last day to hang out together alone, how would you spend the day?

Zoniac Zone



Key Takeaways

The special time of year that started with Rosh Hashana culminates with the joyous high point of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah. Like the king savoring private time with his son after a grand celebration with guests, Shemini Atzeres represents an intimate celebration between Hashem and

the Jewish people after the seven days of Sukkos. Simchas Torah celebrates the completion of the annual Torah reading cycle and immediately beginning anew, featuring a whirlwind day of hakafos, passionate singing and dancing with the Torah in shul.



TheZone Hakafos

Simchas Torah at TheZone has a unique and unforgettable flavor. The celebration begins with a time-honored tradition: auctioning off the merit of reciting one of the pesukim of *Atah Hareisah* said aloud before hakafos begin. But at TheZone, instead of money, these pesukim are given to campers in exchange for kabbalos taken. A boy might resolve to wear tzitzis or to say Modeh Ani every morning.



The hakafos themselves are alive with the energy and enthusiasm characteristic of a yeshiva's hakafos. They last for hours,

late into the night and again throughout the day, filled with spirited singing, exuberant dancing... and lots of candy and flags for the kids! All the Torah scrolls are taken out of the aron kodesh, giving everyone a chance to kiss and hold them. A grand kiddush provides a festive break, and then the dancing resumes as the shul pulsates with Torah joy almost until the day ends. As night falls, bringing the Yom Tov season to its close, the uplifting inspiration of Simchas Torah is carried home for the weeks and months ahead.



Zoniac Challenge

Match the word in Column A to the corresponding description in Column B.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. Atzeres | A. Dancing seven circuits with Torah scrolls |
| 2. Seventy bulls | B. Beginning of new Torah cycle |
| 3. One bull and one ram | C. To stop |
| 4. V'zos Habracha | D. Children's special aliyah |
| 5. Bereishis | E. Shemini Atzeres sacrifices |
| 6. Hakafos | F. Aliyah that completes the Torah |
| 7. Kol Ne'arim | G. Sukkos sacrifices for all nations |
| 8. Chasan Torah | H. Final Torah portion |
| 9. Rain prayers | I. Started in Mussaf on Shemini Atzeres |





Why So Much Food on Shabbos and Yom Tov?

Rabbi Chaim Mintz
from Ask The Rabbi Book1 pg. 272

All the Jewish holidays are so **food oriented**, with **lavish, extravagant meals**. Shouldn't they be days that focus on more **spiritual stuff**, like on Yom Kippur?

We were put here in this physical world and given a commandment in the Torah to be holy. The simple way to accomplish this is by abstaining from worldly pleasures. However, that is not the ultimate achievement. The greatness of a Jew lies in his ability to partake of materialism for the reasons G-d has outlined for us, and connect it to Hashem, transforming it into something spiritual. Enjoying food for the sake of performing a mitzvah is obviously easier said than done, but this is our mission as Jews. As Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, the great sage and founder of the Mussar movement, put it: "It is easier to fast on Yom Kippur for the sake of Heaven than to eat on Erev Yom Kippur for the sake of Heaven." It is important to understand that spiritual perfection can be reached only through a happy medium, a combination of both approaches. In general, one should be only moderately involved in the pleasures of this world. However, at certain times, such as on Shabbos or Yom Tov, one should partake of delicacies and other pleasures for the purpose of a mitzvah, thereby infusing spirituality into the material world. Thus, a person enjoying his meal on Shabbos or Yom Tov with the intention of fulfilling Hashem's will is doing a great mitzvah. Similarly, one who feels the need for some relaxation or enjoyment and has in mind that this will help him serve Hashem better, is turning the physical world into a more spiritual place. Additionally, since a person is physical and associates with physical enjoyment, delicacies can actually enhance our service of Hashem. Eating good food puts a person in a good mood, and when in a cheerful frame of mind, one can feel more vividly the pleasure of celebrating the festival Hashem has given us. Thus, the food isn't an end unto itself. Rather, it's a tried-and-true way for a person to feel Hashem's goodness and use this feeling to come close to Him.

IN SHORT: An integral part of our greatness is our ability to partake of the material world, and transform the physical into a vehicle of spirituality.



Zoniac Dilemma



Aaron stared at the gold-embossed invitation in his hands. His cousin Derek was having his bar mitzvah party on Sunday night – the same night as Simchas Torah. Derek's family wasn't religious at all, and this was going to be the party of the year. Professional DJ, laser lights, the works. All of Aaron's cousins would be there, plus kids from his old school he barely saw anymore since switching to Jewish day school.

"Are you excited?" his mom asked, peeking over his shoulder. "Aunt Linda said they spent months planning this. And Derek specifically asked for you to be there."

Aaron's stomach twisted. He'd just been learning with his TorahMate from camp about Simchas Torah being like a private celebration between Hashem and the Jewish people and the pure joy in finishing and starting the Torah again. He'd been looking forward to experiencing the hakafos at his new shul; he knew a bunch of his favorite dance songs from camp were Simchas Torah tunes. Maybe he'd even get called up for an aliyah.

But his parents didn't really understand why he'd want to spend the evening at synagogue instead of celebrating with family. "It's not like you're skipping Yom Kippur," his dad had said earlier. "And family is important too, right?"

Aaron knew Derek would be hurt if he didn't show up, and his extended family already thought he was becoming "too religious." Plus, the party would probably be really fun.

What should Aaron do, and how should he handle it with his family?



Daily Challenge

Show your love for the Torah every day by giving your chumash or sefer a kiss before putting it away.



Sources

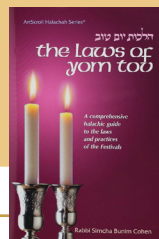
- 1) Sefer Hachinuch, mitzvos 297 & 325
- 2) Gemara Megilah 32a
- 3) Chasam Sofer Vayikra 23:2
- 4) Eitz Yosef on Yom Tov Shemoneh Esrei
- 5) Aruch Hashulchan 495:4, 529:1,4
- 6) Pesachim 118a
- 7) Shulchan Aruch 529
- 8) Pesachim 117a & 18a
- 9) Ramban Vayikra 23:7, Chinuch 397
- 10) Mishnah Berurah 512:2
- 11) Shulchan Aruch Siman 527
- 12) Pesikta D'Rav Kehana ch. 30, Yalkut Shimoni Pinchos #782
- 13) Tehilim 118:24
- 14) Hemek Davar Vayikra 23:36; Tosafos Bava Basra 21a
- 15) Shulchan Aruch Siman 668
- 16) Ibid
- 17) Remah 667:1
- 18) Tanchumah Pinchas 15, Chizkuni Bamidbar 29:35
- 19) Mateh Moshe 973
- 20) Chinuch Mitzvah 324
- 21) Avudraham 28:1
- 22) Bamidbar 29:36
- 23) Vayikra 23:36
- 24) Pesikta D'Rav Kehana ch. 30, Yalkut Shimoni Pinchos #782, Daas Zekainim Bamidbar 29:36
- 25) Tosafos Bava Basrah 21a, Chinuch Mitzvah #360, He'emek Davar Vayikrah 23:36
- 26) Oznam Latorah Vayikra 23:36
- 27) Pesikta D'Rav Kehana ch. 30, Yalkut Shimoni Pinchos #782
- 28) Bamidbar Raba 21:23, Tanchuma 16
- 29) Pesikta D'Rav Kehana ch. 30, Yalkut Shimoni Pinchos #782
- 30) Bais Yosef Siman 669, Maharik shores 9
- 31) Shir Hashirim Raba 1:9
- 32) Remah, Levush 669:1
- 33) Elyah Raba 669:9
- 34) Mishnah Berurah 669:10
- 35) Yoma 70a
- 36) Remah 669:1
- 37) Ibid
- 38) Kuntras L'Hisorrirus Yamim Noroim Moadim Sefer Bereishis, p. 84



Dig Deeper *Resources for Advanced Learning*



Rav Pam on the Festivals



The Laws of Yom Tov
by Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen