

Florence Melton Adult Mini-School  
Section: Rhythms of Jewish Living  
<http://mcohen02.tripod.com/rhythms.html>  
Instructor: Marsha B. Cohen  
E-mail: [marbcohen@gmail.com](mailto:marbcohen@gmail.com)  
<http://mcohen02.tripod.com/rhythms.html>

## Topic: Sukkot

**Key Idea:** *Sukkot* ("Booths" or "Tabernacles") is referred in the *kiddush* and liturgical festival inserts as "*z'man simchateinu*"—the season of our joy. Historically it commemorates the Exodus from Egypt, after which the Israelites dwelled in booths during their wandering in the desert (Lev. 23:42-43), and agriculturally it marks the final harvest before the onset of the winter rains in the Land of Israel. *Sukkot* is the first harvest festival of the new calendar year but the third and last of the cycle of harvest/pilgrimage festivals (*shalosh regalim*) which began with *Pesach* (Passover) in Nisan. It begins on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei, on which there is a full moon. The full moons beginning *Pesach* and *Sukkot* are exactly 6 lunar months apart.

*Sukkot* is uniquely observed by “dwelling” in a *sukkah*, a fragile shelter made of natural materials, and by the gathering and waving of the *arba minim* (4 species): *lulav* (palm branch), *hadas* (myrtle), *aravot* (willows) bound together, and an *etrog* (citron). These species were abundant and readily available to everyone in Israel. Many symbolic explanations have been given of the *sukkah* and of these 4 species, which generally are seen as symbolizing God's protection, bounty and blessings. Maimonides suggests they symbolize the change from life in the wilderness to life in a land of rivers and fruit trees.

With its emphasis on nature and God's protection of his creatures, *Sukkot* is the most universal of the Jewish holidays, and it is customary to invite guests, both living and ancestral, into the *sukkah*. The 7<sup>th</sup> day of *Sukkot*, *Hoshana Rabba*, is marked by the beating of the willows of the *lulav* at the synagogue, and is considered to be the day upon which the “final seal” is placed on the *Yom Kippur* verdict.

### *Our discussion of the texts:*

**Text 1. Deuteronomy 16: 13-17.** *Sukkot* as a pilgrimage festival.

**Text 2. Leviticus 23:39-44.** The biblical commandments to observe *Sukkot* by dwelling in booths and taking the *arbah minim* (4 species).

**Suppl. text. Nehemiah 8:13-18.** Ezra (458 BCE) and Nehemiah (c. 444-432 BCE) come to Jerusalem from Persia, bringing with them the teachings of the Torah. (According to rabbinic *Seder Olam* based chronology, Ezra came to Jerusalem in 348 BCE and Nehemiah in 335 BCE.)

**Text 3. Blessing (*beracha*) recited on dwelling in the *sukkah*.** – What ritual action(s) does “dwelling in the *sukkah* require in order to fulfill the *mitzvah*?

**Text 4. Babylonian Talmud, *Sukkah* 28b.** The obligation to dwell in the *sukkah*.

**Text 5. *RaSHBaM* (Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir, 1085-1158).** The *sukkah* is a reminder of the gratitude owed to God for the land, for homes, for material prosperity and for well-being. Israelites.

**Text 6. Rabbi Irving (“Yitz”) Greenberg.** “*Sukkot: the Reenactment of the Exodus Journey.*” Lessons that can be learned from the construction requirements of a *sukkah*.

**Text 7. Rabbi Marc Angel, “The Pilgrim Festivals.”** Recapturing the feeling of wandering experienced by the ancient Israelites by dwelling in the *sukkah*.

**Text 8.** Rabbi Rebecca Alpert and Jacob Staub, “The Rhythm of the Calendar.” The shift of mood between *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkot*.

**Text 9.** Monford Harris, “A Dwelling in History.” The *sukkah* as historic space.

**Text 10.** Blessing (*beracha*) recited before waving the *arbah minim* (four species).

**Text 11.** *Midrash Rabbah*, Leviticus 30. The symbolism of the *lulav* and the *etrog*

**Text 12.** Ari Goldman, “The Four Species.” An anthropological approach to the *lulav* and *etrog*.