

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Shabbat Chol Ha'moed Sukkot 5782
September 25, 2021 *** Tishrei 12, 5782

Today's Portions

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Shabbat Chol Ha'moed in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1019831/jewish/Shabbat-Chol-Hamoed-Torah-Reading-in-a-Nutshell.htm

G-d agrees to Moses' request that His presence only dwell amongst the Jews. Moses requests to be shown G-d's glory. G-d agrees, but informs Moses that he will only be shown G-d's "back," not G-d's "face."

G-d tells Moses to carve new tablets upon which G-d will engrave the Ten Commandments. Moses takes the new tablets up to Mt. Sinai, where G-d reveals His glory to Moses while proclaiming His Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. G-d seals a covenant with Moses, assuring him again that His presence will only dwell with the Jews. G-d informs the Jewish people that He will drive the Canaanites from before them. He instructs them to destroy all vestiges of idolatry from the land, not to make molten gods, to refrain from making any covenants with its current inhabitants, to sanctify male firstborn humans and cattle, and not to cook meat together with milk.

The Jews are commanded to observe the three festivals — including the holiday of Sukkot, "the festival of the ingathering, at the turn of the year." All males are commanded to make pilgrimage to "be seen by G-d" during these three festivals.

The *maftir*, from the Book of Numbers, discusses the public offerings brought in the Temple on this day of Sukkot.

Shabbat Chol Ha'moed Haftarah in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1019866/jewish/Shabbat-Chol-Hamoed-Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The subject of the *haftarah* of this Shabbat is the war of Gog and Magog that will precede the Final Redemption. Its connection to the holiday of Sukkot is that according to tradition the war will take place during the month of Tishrei, the month when the holiday of Sukkot falls. In addition, this war is identical to the one described in the fourteenth chapter of Zachariah, the *haftarah* read on

the first day of Sukkot, which concludes by saying that the gentile survivors of this war will be required to go to Jerusalem every year on the holiday of Sukkot to pay homage to G-d.

The prophet describes Gog's war against Israel and G-d's furious response. G-d will send an earthquake, pestilence, great floods and hailstones and fire—utterly destroying Gog's armies.

"And I will reveal Myself in My greatness and in My holiness and will be recognized in the eyes of many nations, and they will know that I am the Lord. . . . I will make known My Holy Name in the midst of My people Israel, and I will no longer cause My Holy Name to be profaned, and the nations will know that I, the Lord, am holy in Israel."

The *haftorah* concludes by saying that the weaponry of the defeated armies of Gog will provide fuel for fire for seven years! The Jews "shall carry no wood from the fields nor cut down any from the forests, for they shall make fires from the weapons."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

[Succot For Our Time \(extract from the Koren Sacks Succot Machzor\)](https://rabbisacks.org/sukkot-time-extract-koren-sacks-sukkot-mahzor/)
<https://rabbisacks.org/sukkot-time-extract-koren-sacks-sukkot-mahzor/>

Of all the festivals, Succot is surely the one that speaks most powerfully to our time. Kohelet could almost have been written in the twenty-first century. Here is the picture of ultimate success, the man who has it all – the houses, the cars, the clothes, the adoring women, the envy of others – he has pursued everything this world can offer from pleasure to possessions to power to wisdom and yet, surveying the totality of his life, he can only say, in effect, "Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless."

Kohelet's failure to find meaning is directly related to his obsession with the "I" and the "Me": "I built for myself. I gathered for myself. I acquired for myself." The more he pursues his desires, the emptier his life becomes. There is no more powerful critique of the consumer society, whose idol is the self, whose icon is the "selfie" and whose moral code is "Whatever works for you." This is the society that achieved unprecedented affluence, giving people more choices than they have ever known, and yet at same time saw an unprecedented rise in alcohol and drug abuse, eating disorders, stress-related syndromes, depression, attempted suicide and actual suicide. A society of tourists, not pilgrims, is not one that will yield the sense of a life worth living. Of all things people have chosen to worship, the self is the least fulfilling. A culture of narcissism quickly gives way to loneliness and despair. Kohelet was also, of course, a cosmopolitan: a man at home everywhere and therefore nowhere. This is the man who had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines but in the end could only say, "More bitter than death is

the woman.” It should be clear to anyone who reads this in the context of the life of King Solomon, the author of the book, that Kohelet is not really talking about women but about himself.

In the end Kohelet finds meaning in simple things. “Sweet is the sleep of a labouring man.” “Enjoy life with the woman you love.” “Eat, drink and enjoy the sun.” That, ultimately, is the meaning of Succot as a whole. It is a festival of simple things. It is, Jewishly, the time we come closer to nature than any other, sitting in a hut with only leaves for a roof, and taking in our hands the unprocessed fruits and foliage of the palm branch, the citron, twigs of myrtle and leaves of willow. It is a time when we briefly liberate ourselves from the sophisticated pleasures of the city and the processed artefacts of a technological age, where we take time to recapture some of the innocence we had when we were young, when the world still had the radiance of wonder. The power of Succot is that it takes us back to the most elemental roots of our being. You don’t need to live in a palace to be surrounded by clouds of glory. You don’t need to be gloriously wealthy to buy yourself the same leaves and fruit that a billionaire uses in worshipping God. Living in the succah and inviting guests to your meal, you discover that the people who have come to visit you are none other than Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their wives (such is the premise of Ushpizin, the mystical guests). What makes a hut more beautiful than a home is that when it comes to Succot there is no difference between the richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor. We are all strangers on earth, temporary residents in God’s almost eternal universe. And whether or not we are capable of pleasure, whether or not we have found happiness, nonetheless we can all feel joy.

Succot is the time we ask the most profound question of what makes a life worth living. Having prayed on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to be written in the Book of Life, Kohelet forces us to remember how brief life actually is, and how vulnerable. “Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” What matters is not how long we live, but how intensely we feel that life is a gift we repay by giving to others. Joy, the overwhelming theme of the festival, is what we feel when we know that it is a privilege simply to be alive, inhaling the intoxicating beauty of this moment amidst the profusion of nature, the teeming diversity of life and the sense of communion with those many others who share our history and our hope.

Most majestically of all, Succot is the festival of insecurity. It is the candid acknowledgment that there is no life without risk, yet we can face the future without fear when we know we are not alone. God is with us, in the rain that brings blessings to the earth, in the love that brought the universe and us into being, and in the resilience of spirit that allowed a small and vulnerable people to outlive the greatest empires the world has ever known. Succot reminds us that God’s glory was present in the small, portable Tabernacle Moses and the Israelites built in the desert even more emphatically than in Solomon’s Temple with all its grandeur. A Temple can be destroyed. But a

succah, even if broken, can be rebuilt tomorrow. Security is not something we can achieve physically but it is something we can acquire mentally, psychologically, spiritually. All it needs is the courage and willingness to sit under the shadow of God's sheltering wings.

[What Exactly is a Sukkah by David Zev Moster](https://www.jtsa.edu/what-exactly-is-a-sukkah)

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Have you ever asked yourself what defines a sukka? Not how to build one or what makes it kosher, but why have one in the first place? What is its purpose? Was the sukka part of daily life in ancient Israel? Did it have a role outside the holiday that bears its name?

The Torah does not address any of these questions directly. To solve the riddle of the sukka we must first turn to the book of Isaiah, which mentions the sukka as an aside in two passages. In 1:8 we read:

וְנוֹתְרָה בְּתִצִּיּוֹן כְּסֹכָה בְּכַרְם כְּמִלוּנָה בְּמִקְשָׁה כְּעִיר נְצוּרָה:

The daughter of Zion is left as a sukka in a vineyard, as a hut in a cucumber patch, as a city besieged.

This analogy reveals two details: (1) the sukka was situated in the agricultural fields, and (2) it was a vulnerable, probably temporary structure.

The second passage is 4:6:

וְסֹכָה תִהְיֶה לְצִל־יוֹמָם מֵחֶרֶב וּלְמַחְסָה וּלְמִסְתָּוֶר מִזֶּרֶם וּמִמָּטָר:

[God's protection] shall be a sukka for shade during the days from heat, and as a refuge and shelter from the downpour and rain.

The sukka's purpose was to protect one from the elements. That is why Jonah built a sukka outside the city of Nineveh (Jonah 4:5). The sun was hot and there was no shade to be found in the fields. The sukka was his only shelter and without it he wished to die (4:8).

While the books of Isaiah and Jonah tell us much about the sukka, we still do not know why the sukka is connected to Sukkot. For this we will turn to a different type of source, the ethnographic record. During the 1800s and early 1900s, a number of travelers described the practices of the Arab farmers in the land of Israel, then known as Palestine. These travel writings are important to Bible scholars because they describe agricultural practices very similar to the ones found in the Tanakh and archaeology. For example, in 1838, Edward Robinson and Eli Smith described the grape harvest outside of Hebron:

"The vintage is a season of hilarity and rejoicing to all; the town is then deserted, and the people live among the vineyards in lodges and in tents. The produce of these vineyards is celebrated throughout Palestine." Biblical Researches in Palestine (Boston: 1856), 2:81.

The "lodges and tents" were in all likelihood the sukka mentioned in the books of Isaiah and Jonah. What Robinson and Smith add is that the sukka was used during the harvest, which was a time of great joy and celebration. Similarly, Gustav Dalman observed in the early 1900s:

“[Between August and October], when the ripe grapes and figs need to be watched night and day, the farmer lives with his whole family in the vineyards ([Arabic] kerūm), which are also fig orchards. There he erects a pergola (‘arīshe, khēme) out of some poles, usually on the roughly built watch-tower (qaṣr, maṅṭara) that always stands there (Is 5:2; Matth 21:33), and covers it with leafy branches or reeds. Living under the pergola means a joyful time during which there is no lack of special songs, and people eat their fill of fruit.” Work and Customs in Palestine, translated by Nadia Abdulhadi Sukhtian (Ramallah: Dar Al Nasher, 2013), 165 [161].

Dalman’s “pergolas,” or “Laube” in the original German, would have been called sukkot in Hebrew. Dalman clarifies how the farmer’s sukkah was occupied during the days of the tree-fruit harvest, which were arguably the happiest days of the year.

Now that we have examined Isaiah, Jonah, and the ethnographic record, let us focus on [Leviticus 23:39](#) and [Deuteronomy 16:13](#), which explicitly link the holiday of Sukkot to the harvest:

אַךְ בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאַסְפְּכֶם אֶת־תְּבוּאֵת הָאָרֶץ תַּחְגּוּ אֶת־חַג־יְהוָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים

Certainly, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month when you gather in the produce of your land you shall observe the festival of the Lord seven days. ([Leviticus 23:39](#))

חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה לָךְ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בְּאַסְפְּךָ מִגֶּרְנֶךָ וּמִיִּקְבֶּךָ:

You shall observe the festival of Sukkot for seven days when you gather in from your threshing floor and your wine vat. ([Deuteronomy 16:13](#))

Sukkot and the harvest are inextricably tied to one another. Whereas Passover coincided with the barley harvest, and Shavuot coincided with the wheat harvest, Sukkot coincided with the tree-fruit harvest. This meant grapes, pomegranates, olives, dates, and figs. Dried grains were also brought indoors at this time in anticipation of the coming winter rains.

What emerges from this analysis is that Sukkot is a celebration of the fruit harvest, and the fruit harvest is celebrated in the sukkah. For the ancient Israelite, the sukkah would have conjured up feelings of joy and thanksgiving to God. That is why the sukkah was—and still is—a fitting symbol for the holiday that bears its name. (*David Zev Moster is Adjunct Assistant Professor of Bible at JTS*)

[Simhat Torah: A Creation of the Jewish People by Rabbi Yitz Greenberg](https://mechonhadar.s3.amazonaws.com/mh_torah_source_sheets/GreenbergSimchatTorah5782.pdf?utm_campaign=Dvar%20Torah%205781&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=159910660&_hsenc=p2ANqtz--p6KsLMXBWUjV7TCCittLu1EPzYdtIYM_Ci496Qa4xHksC8nRWRVNmXRJmHvkT83hOzX5dieNJxdRCxxlksIP4AaVivg&utm_content=159910660&utm_source=hs_email)

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Until the 20th century, Simhat Torah was the last Jewish holiday to emerge. Of all the inherited holidays of the Hebrew calendar, only Simhat Torah (literally, “Rejoicing in the Torah”) is not referred to either in the Bible or in the Talmud. Its establishment is a triumph of the Torah she-ba-al peh (the Oral Tradition) which accompanied, interpreted, and applied the Written Scriptures to the constantly changing conditions of Jewish history. **1** According to Rabbinic tradition, the Oral Tradition was also revealed at Sinai, albeit not written down, and is of equal authority to the Written Scriptures. **2**

The reading of the Torah (with translation and commentary, so the masses would understand) probably goes back to the return from the Babylonian Exile in Second Temple times. **3** The custom of reading it weekly became dominant after the Destruction of the Temple when the Torah text became the center of Jewish practice and religious experience. There were two established Torah reading patterns. In Israel, the Five Books were read weekly, but the cycle was completed over a three-year period. In the Diaspora, communities that followed Babylonian Jewish practices, the Torah cycle was read and completed in one year. Somewhere between the ninth and twelfth centuries, the Babylonian custom won out.

All the communities then read the Five Books in the course of the year, with the last chapter of Deuteronomy read on Shemini Atzeret. This day concludes the intense holiday season of Tishrei—from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur to Sukkot and, finally, Shemini Atzeret (the Eighth Day of Assembly). The Torah text is a bit vague but seems to treat Shemini Atzeret as a separate holiday, although it follows the seventh day of Sukkot. While Shemini Atzeret is called in our liturgy *z'man simhateinu* (time of our rejoicing), as is Sukkot, the day has no specific practices comparable to waving the lulav and etrog or building a sukkah. This led Shemini Atzeret open to the development of a celebration of the Torah, which eventually morphed into the holiday of Simhat Torah.

As the tradition of completing the annual Torah reading on Shemini Atzeret became increasingly established, the community made two important additions to the day. Out of love of the Torah and tradition, people added elements of celebration: of dancing with the Torah, of honoring the person called up for the final reading, and of singing and dancing at the completion of the cycle. Over time, the custom grew that every male **4** member of the congregation be given an aliyah, and all the children of the congregation would be called up with an adult in one aliyah. The entire group joined in the blessing of the Torah and the whole congregation joined in a special blessing of the children afterward.

The second important set of additions was meant to signal that the study of the Torah never ends. After the last portion of Deuteronomy, a second Torah was brought out and the opening portion of Genesis (the Creation story, Genesis 1:1-2:3) was read. The full opening parashah of Genesis (1:1-6:8) was read on the following Shabbat. But on this day the opening portion was read to make clear the intention to pursue a never-ending cycle of Torah study

and reading. In the words of the Rabbis: “Hafokh ba ve-hafokh ba, de-khola va,” “Turn it over (i.e. analyze and reflect) and turn it over again, for all (i.e. endless wisdom and teaching) is in it” (Mishnah Avot 5:22).

All this expansion in celebration culminated in crystallizing the day as Simhat Torah, the holiday of rejoicing in the Torah. In the Diaspora, when there was an extra holy day in each festival, Simhat Torah was assigned to the ninth day after the start of Sukkot. In Israel, it was folded into Shemini Atzeret on the eighth day.

The celebration and dancing component of Simhat Torah enabled the holiday to play a central role in the reunion of Soviet Jewry with Judaism and world Jewry. Young Russian Jews—at first a handful, but eventually by the tens of thousands—reconnected to a religion which had been denied to them by attending the Simhat Torah celebration in Moscow’s main Synagogue on Archipova Street. For people who could not read Hebrew or say a prayer, just being present or joining in the dancing became an act of defiance of tyranny and of reclaiming their Jewish identity. When unaffiliated Jews keep only one holiday, it is typically Yom Kippur, a day of fasting, no drinking, self-denial, and endless—often incomprehensible—prayers. But I have always marveled at the Soviet Jews who wisely chose to connect to the holiday cycle with Simhat Torah, a day of socializing, dancing, and celebration.

In addition to filling Shemini Atzeret with a special observance, there was another logic for developing Simhat Torah in this season. Pesah and Sukkot, exactly six months apart, both celebrate the Exodus from Egypt, the core event of Jewish religion. The people noted that seven weeks (7 times 7 days) plus one day after the Exodus, the Hebrew calendar marks the holiday of Shavuot as the holiday of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. **5** Shavuot was known as Hag Ha-Atzeret (the Holiday of Assembly), when the people gathered to receive the Torah at Sinai, and reenacted that acceptance every year. Atzeret also means the closing assembly, as in Shemini Atzeret. The logic of the biblical calendar was that the Exodus was not only an event of liberation from servitude, but the beginning of a process which climaxed with the acceptance of the Torah and the covenant on Shavuot. Thereby Jewry became a “holy nation” with a mission to pace humanity toward a future redemption (i.e. tikkun olam), when the world would be redeemed.

The people saw that Sukkot—the celebration of the Exodus liberation from Egypt in Tishrei—could be connected to a seven plus one day as well, namely Shemini Atzeret. This Atzeret/Assembly would parallel Shavuot by closing the liberation process with a renewed acceptance and celebration of the Torah and covenant on the eighth day. This was the message of Simhat Torah, which became a kind of parallel Shavuot.

There is another message in the establishment of Simhat Torah. The processes of revelation and of living the covenant did not stop with the founding events and religious leaders of Judaism. Judaism is a covenantal way of life. Jewry goes through history trying to redeem the world and teach

all nations the good life, and about the divine-human partnership, in order to turn this planet into a paradise. Therefore, the creation of new holy days and absorption of new religious experiences is appropriate and welcome. It is a sign that Judaism is alive and that every generation can contribute to the unfolding of the Torah. **6**

The fact that the people created Simhat Torah also is testimony to the quality and inspiration of Jewry. The advance of the Torah is not just accomplished through divine revelation, or by the authority of learned scholars, but is driven by the collective wisdom and spirit of Jewry. The vitality of Jewish activity in history in recent centuries has been expressed from the grassroots up. Zionism was mostly initiated by a small avant-garde of the people who understood that it was time to end exile, persecution, and powerlessness, and to renew Jewish life.

I believe that the Holocaust and the rebirth of Israel represent major developments on the Jewish way in history. Therefore, Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Commemoration Day) and Yom Ha'Atzma'ut (Israel Independence Day) are major new holy days on the sacred Hebrew calendar. When I wrote my book on the Jewish holidays, *The Jewish Way*, I included chapters on these two contemporary days, arguing that they are sacred and central to Jewish self-understanding, just as the classic holidays such as Pesah, Shavuot, and Sukkot are. It is notable that these holy days were established by so-called “secular authorities,” particularly the Knesset of the State of Israel, in response to the popular will. To my mind, it is regrettable that Haredi leadership has opposed these initiatives, while many other religious leaderships have dragged their feet or accepted these days with limited fervor and support.

One of my father's favorite quotes from the Talmud was: “leave it to the children of Israel [to get the religious issues right and add new religious experiences]—for if they are not prophets themselves [prophecy having ended two millennia ago] they are the children of the prophets” (Babylonian Talmud Pesahim 66a). This means that Jews have an innate spiritual quality that inspires them to live covenantally—i.e. authentically religiously—in changing times and new civilizations.

This year, when you go celebrate and dance and experience Simhat Torah, know as you experience this joy that you are confirming the wisdom and creative religious spirit of the Jewish people. Follow this up with absorbing the new sacred events and memories of world Jewry and acting them out. We are witnessing the emergence of the next phase of Jewish renewal and religious renaissance.

1 Rabbinics scholar Jacob Neusner has called Rabbinic Judaism, “the Judaism of the Dual Torah.” This is the fundamental claim of the Pharisees and the Rabbinic movement which grew out of their teaching. This is against the view of the Sadducees, the main competing sect to the Pharisees, who insisted that only the Written Scriptures were

divinely given at Sinai. The rejection of the Oral Torah was also the hallmark of the Karaites who clashed with the Rabbinites into the Middle Ages. The Karaites eventually separated from the Rabbinic Jewish community. Now that Israel has become home of a major living Jewish community and the Karaites (in very diminished numbers) have come back to this land, there are some tentative efforts to reconnect. **2** It could be argued that the Oral Torah is superior in authority, in that there are oral interpretations which are authoritative as to the meaning of the Written Torah, even though they could be seen as “overriding” the plain meaning of the Torah’s statements. Two famous examples: the Torah says, “an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, etc.” (Exodus 21:24) is the punishment for knocking out another’s limb. However, the Oral Law says the actual punishment is a monetary value of the lost limb, and one does not literally inflict equivalent physical damage (see Mishnah Bava Kama 8:1 and Babylonian Talmud Bava Kama 84a). Second, the Torah says, in corporal punishment, that a maximum of forty lashes can be administered (“forty times he shall strike him and no more” [Deuteronomy 25:3]), but the Talmud rules the maximum is 39, and that was the actual legal practice. See Babylonian Talmud Makkot 22b. **3** See Nehemiah 7-8. **4** In the 20th century, the liberal denominations and progressive Orthodox brought women into this ritual. **5** The number 7 in the Bible is a signifier of wholeness and completion. The creation is completed on the seventh day, Shabbat, which itself represents wholeness and completion. The number 8 (7+1) in the Bible is a signifier of covenant. Humans take God’s creation—rated at 7—and join a covenant to improve it even more (7+1). Shavuot, the holiday of the covenant, occurs 50 days, 7x7 days (i.e. completion squared) after the Exodus, +1 covenant day. **6** See also my essay on Parashat Bo which explores this theme of Jewish holidays as a core expression of the unfolding covenantal way, “The Hebrew Calendar is the First Commandment,” available here: <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/hebrew-calendar-first-commandment>.

Yahrtzeits

Blossom Primer remembers Irwin’s sister Rose Rand on Saturday September 25th (Tishri 19).

Perry Fine remembers his father Melvin Fine (Melech ben Avraham v'Ettel) on Monday September 27th (Tishri 21).

Mel Zwillenberg remembers Susan’s mother Trudy Altman (Grunah) on Friday October 1st (Tishri 25)