

Kol Rina  
*An Independent Minyan*  
Shabbat Chol Hamoed Sukkot  
October 15, 2022 \*\*\* 20 Tishrei, 5783

Shabbat Chol Hamoed Torah Reading in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/1019831/jewish/Shabbat-Chol-Hamoed-Torah-Reading-in-a-Nutshell.htm](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.

Haftarah in A Nutshell: Ezekiel 38:18-39:16.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/1019866/jewish/Shabbat-Chol-Hamoed-Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](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

Impermanence by Design – Sukkot by Grace Gleason

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/impermanence-by-design/>

If your sukkot are anything like mine, something usually falls off or blows away at some point during the week. This was true of my backyard sukkah in North Carolina, whose hanging decorations were not securely fastened enough to withstand the wind, and the skhakh of my Upper West Side balcony, which unfortunately ended up on someone else's roof.

Sukkot are impermanent by design. This is our lesson and our meditation throughout the week. In the Babylonian Talmud ([Sukkah 23a](#)), our rabbis argue about how strong a wind a sukkah should be able to withstand in order to be considered kosher: does it need to be able to withstand a strong wind, or just average wind? We can feel the tension—on the one hand, we want our sukkot to be strong and sturdy, on the other hand, the holiday pushes us to acknowledge that they may just blow away. The Mishnah in [Sukkah 22a](#) suggests that in the ideal sukkah, one should be able to see stars through the roof—in order, I think, that we might contemplate the great expanse of the universe, and our relative temporality and insignificance.

Our rabbis assigned Kohelet, the book of Ecclesiastes, to be read on the holiday of Sukkot as a further directive to contemplate impermanence. "All is transient!"

Kohelet exclaims ([Eccles. 1:2](#)) and spends the rest of the book trying to reconcile with this fundamental truth of our lives.

What is the purpose of pursuing anything, Kohelet asks, if we are all headed for the same end? What is the point of not only wealth, but wisdom? Wisdom doesn't protect us from our inevitable death.

In 1973, Ernest Becker published his book *The Denial of Death*, a psychological schema that placed at the center of most human behavior this very fundamental fear: that our lives are insignificant, and we will die. His ideas developed into Terror Management Theory, a psychological theory stating that many of our actions are motivated by our need to insulate ourselves from our "deep fear of living an insignificant life destined to be erased by death." Avoiding the fact of our mortality thus ends up animating nearly everything we do as humans.

According to Terror Management Theory, the pitfalls of this unexamined fear are

not only personal and spiritual, but social and political, because one way that we address this fear is by assuring ourselves that we are part of an important group. We may tell ourselves, “Well, my life is short. But I’m part of the most important group, culture, religion or nationality. So that will outlive me.” It’s easy to see how this can become quite a dangerous ideology.

We see this problematic way of addressing fear of death playing out in other ways as well: we derive psychological comfort from not thinking about the climate crisis, or about the erosion of our democracy. Supremacist ideologies are taking hold perhaps in part to counteract our sense of individual insignificance, the same discomfort of the human condition upon which Kohelet spent twelve chapters reflecting.

At its worst, religion can be merely a way of denying death, at times to dangerous ends: by means of asserting our cultural or religious supremacy.

But at its best, religion can be a roadmap for how to truly grapple with our impermanence. I believe that it is too tall an order for most people to confront their own mortality in a vacuum. We need narrative, ritual, and community to come to a sense of peace and wisdom—indeed, this is the journey that Kohelet takes: from fearful immobilization as an individual facing mortality, through a meandering and contradictory path through hedonism and greed, ultimately to the conclusion that doing mitzvot is the best way we have to live as mortals ([Eccles. 12:14](#)). (Whether this was the author’s conclusion or added later by the sages, we can still choose to integrate it into our interpretation of the book’s message).

Thus we come to Sukkot. We have the blessing of a week-long ritual that rehearses impermanence for us in an external, physical, communal, and joyful way. Our tradition gives us this gift. We learn not to take for granted those structures that we hope to continue, but to work together to continually rebuild them. We also learn to embrace impermanence. Our tradition tells us: there is no use in denial, and there is no use in comforting distraction. Together, we practice impermanence with our eyes wide open, looking at the stars together.

As we continue to eat, sing, and dwell in sukkot together this week, may we be shaped into human beings more capable of facing the uncertainty of life. During this zeman simhateinu, may we confront our fears not only with wisdom, but with joy. (*Grace Gleason is a student at The Rabbinical School of JTS, Class of 2023*)

[The Climax of Sukkot and the Profound Joy of the Journey by Rabbi Rachel Sabath Beit-Halachmi, PH.D](#)

<https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/climax-sukkot-and-profound-joy-journey>

More than any other Jewish holiday or ritual, I love the audacity of Sukkot. After the many profound words and seemingly endless prayers of the High Holidays, Sukkot offers a very different holiday mode. The main theme and ultimate goal of the

holiday is to achieve climactic joy. While there are a myriad of customs and rituals associated with the building of the sukkah, and we celebrate the fall harvest, there main mitzvah is to be exceedingly joyful: First the Deuteronomist declares a few times “you shall rejoice” ([Deut. 16:14](#)) and then: “you shall have nothing but joy” or said another way, “you shall be exceedingly joyous” ([Deut. 16:15](#)).

While there are many interesting rituals, the main theme of the holiday is pure joy. We even include in the liturgy in several places a request for a special blessing for Z'man Simchateinu, this “season of our joy.” Why is this season particularly joyful? How can God demand or command an emotion?

What is the source of the joy? The sources of this joy are simply the reality of freedom and the possibility of a radically different future. If we've really been forgiven on Yom Kippur, if the world is truly renewed and freedom is real, then Sukkot is the culmination of all we've ever dreamed of or prayed for—it is a climactic moment. How can we not be joyful?

Like many people, I often bristle at the idea of being told how to feel. But there is something about the motivation for the directive to be exceedingly joyous on Sukkot that makes the idea of transcending oneself and our own issues possible. The motivation is the possibility of a much bigger joy. Emerging out of many hours of prayers, hopefully some deep internal reflection—and definitely a lot of time inside—we suddenly burst out of the synagogue walls and the walls of our homes into the great sukkah outdoors. Dwelling outside in nature is beautiful, but doing so in the insecurity of booths is a powerful ritual reminding us both of the journey out of Egypt and, ultimately, of our place in the universe. We can now fully imagine the joy that is possible if we are willing to embrace it.

Sukkot is also different than all other holidays because it doesn't commemorate a historic event of liberation like Passover but rather an extended journey forward out of slavery, and toward freedom and self-determination. As my teacher Rabbi Yitz Greenberg teaches: “On Passover, Jews restage the great event of liberation. Sukkot celebrates the way of liberation—the march across a barren desert to freedom and the Promised Land” (Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*, 1988, p. 96). Now that we've declared the new year, repented, and declared our intentions, we must set out to embody who we want to be as people, a community, and a force for good in the greater universe. But what is the way of liberation?

There is no better way to embrace our place in the larger universe than leaving our secure dwellings and going outside into whatever the weather is (as long as it's safe!) and embracing it as a reality beyond our control. This letting go of our capacity to control everything and moving into the world with confidence is definitely a potential source of great joy. Redeemed from Egypt, purified by Yom Kippur, we are free to determine our journey and our future. What greater joy can there be?

The Sukkot ritual we still observe today is based on the biblical commandment that the Israelites of ancient times—and we today—dwell in temporary huts for one week a year “in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I the Eternal your God” (Lev. 23:43). But we don’t just go out and embrace the great outdoors, we are required to do so with a particularly deep and profound joy, even if we have to force it a bit at first.

As Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg writes, “Sukkot has become the model for this wordily [as opposed to the next world] enjoyment, which is why it is called the time of rejoicing” (ibid., Greenberg, p.112). The Talmud outlines some of what we can do to help make it happen for those around us. “Our Rabbis taught: A man is duty-bound to make his children and his household rejoice on a festival, for it is said, ‘And you shall rejoice on your feast, [you and your son, and your daughter, etc.]’” (Babylonian Talmud, P’sachim 109a). The Talmudic passage continues by describing the fine food, wine, clothing, and so on that one must give each member of the family so that each one can truly rejoice. It follows that this is a good time to ask how we can help not only ourselves, but also those closest to us to rejoice as well.

Sukkot offers a myriad of ways to ritualize and live the way of liberation, and experience the profound joy in being free to do so. The pure joy of the journey, however, will be constantly challenged by the elements. Every day of the Israelites’ journey through the desert, their building sukkot repeatedly only to have to take them down and keep moving forward, tested their faith and commitment to the journey. As Greenberg writes: “It is relatively easy to rise to one peak moment of ... courageous commitment. It is more taxing and more heroic to wrestle with everyday obstacles without highs or diversions. True maturity means learning to appreciate the finite rewards of every day along the way” (ibid., Greenberg, p. 97). In this season of our joy the climax is ours to experience, if we realize its potential. But the greater gift is to enter into renewed relationships with those closest to us, with God, and with the universe. Then some deep joy will be ours not only on this holiday, but also for many days in the days and years to come. As the Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav is famously quoted as saying: “It is a mitzvah to be joyous at all times.”

Greenberg writes, “Only those who know the fragility of life can truly appreciate the full preciousness of every moment.... The release from Yom Kippur leads to the extraordinary outburst of life that is Sukkot” (ibid., Greenberg, p.112).

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## [How to Experience God's Wonders Anew by Rabbi Benjamin David](https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/climax-sukkot-and-profound-joy-journey)

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On the Shabbat that falls amid the holiday of Sukkot (Chol HaMo-eid Sukkot) we turn our attention to two distinct sections of Torah: the latter stages of the Book of Exodus and a section of Parashat Pinchas from the Book of Numbers (29:26-31). In the Exodus reading, taken from Parashat Ki Tisa, we read of Moses desiring to see God's face: "Oh, let me behold Your Presence!" (Ex. 33:18). Moses of course learns that he cannot see God's face, nor can we all these years later. God, however, reminds Moses (and us) that God can be felt, if not seen, in the "wonders" that God enacts for us and those around us (Ex .34:10). Indeed, Moses will experience God once and again, even if Moses cannot actually see God. Whether at Sinai, along the winding road to the Promised Land, or in holy encounters with family and community, Moses will absolutely encounter God once and again.

It is amid the holiday of Sukkot that we become privy to God and God's wonders in ways that are unique and lasting. Following the theological heaviness of Yom Kippur, we leave the sanctuary for the sukkah and all that it offers: air, possibility, and physical and spiritual replenishment. In the sukkah, gazing up at an autumn sky, we feel the sheer size of the natural universe of which we are a tiny part. Stars stretch from one end of the sky to the other. A large Tishrei moon shines down bright. Indeed, Sukkot, perhaps unlike any other holiday, urges us to see our world as more than errands, more than angst, more than unnerving news cycles, but as a sprawling collection of diverse people and places, past and present, and myriad miracles and beauty.

Tractate Sukkah of the Babylonian Talmud expounds on the many wide-ranging building sites, sizes, and parameters of a kosher sukkah, all in an effort to encourage us to create our own and dwell within it during the holiday. God commands us into the sukkah precisely so that we can be shaken from routine and potential small-mindedness, and experience anew the grandeur of our world and all that it means to be a part of it. We therefore embark on a brand new year, 5783, with renewed zeal, gratitude, and a sense of wonder.

*(Rabbi Benjamin David is the senior rabbi of Adath Emanu-El in Mt. Laurel, NJ.)*

## [Return of the Clouds by Rabbi Andy Shapiro Katz](https://uscj.org/blog/torah-sparks-shabbat-chol-hamoed-sukkot-5779)

<https://uscj.org/blog/torah-sparks-shabbat-chol-hamoed-sukkot-5779>

The special Torah portion this week gives us a perfect opportunity to pick up where we left off last week. It deals with the giving of the Second Tablets and God forgiving Israel for the sin of the Golden Calf. Rashi (1040-1105) explains in his commentary on Shemot 32:1 and 33:11, that this event occurred on the 10th of

Tishrei, thereby fixing that day forevermore as Yom Kippur, the national Day of Atonement. But why would this be the Torah portion read on Shabbat Chol HaMoed Sukkot?

The obvious answer is that line 34:22 mentions Chag HaAsif, another name for Sukkot, but I think the real reason is that this Torah portion calls attention to the connection between Yom Kippur and Sukkot. Shemot 34:5 reminds us that “God came down in a cloud” when talking to Moshe. It is as a cloud that God provided protection for the entire camp during their travels. When Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, the Clouds of Glory departed. This Torah portion is about Moshe’s efforts to bring them back.

There is a well-known *machloket* (disagreement) in Tractate Sukkah 11b about the meaning of “sukkot” in the verse from VaYikra 23:42-43, “You shall dwell in sukkot for seven days...So that your generations will know that I made the Israelites dwell in sukkot...” Rabbi Eliezer says that “sukkot” means the Clouds of Glory, and Rabbi Akiva says it means “sukkot *mamash*” - *actual* sukkot - either the place called Sukkot or some kind of physical structure.

Later commentators raised additional questions on their *machloket*. If we hold like Rabbi Akiva that it means *actual* sukkot, why is that something so important that God would command us to **know** it? And whether we hold like Rabbi Akiva *or* Rabbi Eliezer, why would we do this in Tishrei, when both the dwelling in sukkot and the appearance of the Clouds of Glory happened in the spring, shortly after they left Egypt?

Many years later, the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) gave a powerful answer: the reason we observe Sukkot on the 15th of Tishrei is that it was the day the Clouds of Glory returned! On the 10th (Yom Kippur), God forgave them and gave the Second Tablets. On the 11th, God told them how to build the Mishkan. On the 12th the people started to bring their donations of the materials, and this continued through the 14th when Moshe told them to stop because they had enough. And then on the 15th, the day that would become the holiday of Sukkot, they started to build the Mishkan and *that is what made the Clouds of Glory return*. So Sukkot commemorates **both** the Clouds of Glory, as per Rabbi Eliezer, **and** the Mishkan - an *actual* physical structure - as per Rabbi Akiva!

Read this way, the *machloket* between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva is really about whether the Sukkah is supposed to remind us of what God did (the return of the Clouds of Glory) or what Bnei Yisrael did (building the Mishkan). Are we *primarily* commemorating/acting out what we *experienced* or what we *did*? That is a question worth asking about many holidays!

And now we can return (finally) to the idea from last week - that the progression from Rosh HsShanah to Yom Kippur to Sukkot to Shemini Atzeret reflects the water/cloud/rain cycle. During Rosh HaShanah/Tashlich we “gather” our sins so that we can cast them away from us into the depths of the sea. On Yom Kippur, we

immerse ourselves in prayer, hoping the mikveh of God's mercy will dissolve the stain of our sins. We then rise above our physicality and ascend to God as pure souls, imitating how polluted water is purified through evaporation as it ascends to the heavens as water vapor.

The days following Yom Kippur are about coalescence. Our coming together to build Sukkot echoes Bnei Yisrael's building of the Mishkan, when they were unified and motivated by the opportunity to create a place where they and God could dwell together. And just as coalescing water vapor forms clouds, Bnei Yisrael's coalescing around the Mishkan caused the Clouds of Glory to return.

For 7 days, we enjoy the clouds/cloud-like Sukkah as protective shade-cover during the last days of summer, as confirmation that God has forgiven our sins and dwells with us, and as a promise of life-sustaining rain. And then on Shemini Atzeret, once Sukkot is over, it is time for rain. So we add "*mashiv haruach u'morid hageshem*" - the one who causes the wind to blow and rain to fall - to the second *bracha* of the Amidah.

As we approach the end of this intense period of personal and national growth, may we all merit to experience the rain of God's blessings! (*Rabbi Katz is the Director of Engagement for the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem*)