

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Sukkot & Shabbat Chol Hamoed
October 17, 2024 *** 15 Tishrei, 5785

Sukkot in a Nutshell

<https://rabbisacks.org/ceremony-celebration-family-edition/succot-family-edition/#in-a-nutshell>

“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 lulav, the etrog, twigs of *hadassim* and *aravim*.”

The Torah tells us to: “Live in succot for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in succot so that your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in succot when I brought them out of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Vayikra 23:42-43).

There are two opinions in the Mishnah. Rabbi Eliezer held that the succah represents the Clouds of Glory that surrounded the Israelites during the wilderness years, protecting them from heat during the day and the cold during the night, and bathing them with the radiance of the Divine Presence. Rabbi Akiva on the other hand said, “*Succot mammash*”, meaning a succah is a succah, no more and no less: it is a hut, a booth, a temporary dwelling. It has no symbolism. It is what it is.

If we follow Rabbi Eliezer then it is obvious why we celebrate by making a succah. It is there to remind us of a miracle. All three pilgrimage festivals are about miracles. Pesach is about the miracle of the Exodus, Shavuot is about the miracle of the revelation at Mount Sinai, and Succot is about God’s tender care of His people, during the journey across the desert. But according to Rabbi Akiva, a succah is merely a hut, so what was the miracle? There is nothing unusual about living in a hut if you are living a nomadic existence in the desert. Why should there be a festival dedicated to something ordinary, commonplace and non-miraculous?

Rashbam (Rashi’s grandson) says the succah was there to remind the Israelites of their past so that at the very moment they were feeling the greatest satisfaction at living in Israel - at the time of the ingathering of the produce of the land - they should remember their lowly origins. They were once a group of refugees without a home, never knowing when they would have to move on. The festival of Succot, according to Rashbam, exists to remind us of our humble origins so that we never fall into the complacency of taking freedom, the land of Israel and the blessings it yields, for granted. However, there is another way of understanding Rabbi Akiva. The succah represents the courage the Israelites had to travel, to move, to leave

security behind, and follow God's call, as did Avraham and Sarah at the dawn of our history. According to Rabbi Akiva the succah is the temporary home of a temporarily homeless people. It symbolised the courage of a bride willing to follow her husband on a risk-laden journey to a place she had never seen before - a love that showed itself in the fact that she was willing to live in a hut, trusting her husband's promise that one day they would have a permanent home.

What is truly remarkable is that Succot is called, by tradition, *zeman simchateinu*, "our time of joy." That, to me, is the wonder at the heart of the Jewish experience: that Jews throughout the ages were able to experience risk and uncertainty at every level of their existence and yet they were still able to rejoice. That is spiritual courage of a high order. Faith is not certainty; faith is the courage to live with uncertainty. Faith is the ability to rejoice in the midst of instability and change, travelling through the wilderness of time toward an unknown destination.

First Days of Sukkot Torah Readings in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/742773/jewish/First-Days-of-Sukkot-Torah-Readings-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The reading begins with an injunction that a newborn calf, lamb, or kid must be left with its mother for seven days; one may not slaughter an animal and its offspring on the same day.

The reading then lists the annual Callings of Holiness – the festivals of the Jewish calendar: the weekly Shabbat; the bringing of the Passover offering on 14 Nissan; the seven-day Passover festival beginning on 15 Nissan; the bringing of the Omer offering from the first barley harvest on the 2nd day of Passover, and the commencement, on that day, of the 49-day Counting of the Omer, culminating in the festival of Shavuot on the 50th day; a "remembrance of shofar blowing" on 1 Tishrei; a solemn fast day on 10 Tishrei; the Sukkot festival – during which we are to dwell in huts for seven days and take the "Four Kinds" – beginning on 15 Tishrei; and the immediately following holiday of the "8th day" of Sukkot (Shemini Atzeret).

G-d declares the fifteenth day (and the subsequent 6 days) of the seventh month to be a holy convocation, no work shall be done during that time. The reading then describes the Sukkot offerings which were brought in the Holy Temple.

Shabbat Chol Hamoed Torah Readings in a Nutshell: Exodus 33:12-34:26

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.

[Lessons From Kohelet: If There is Nothing New Under the Sun, How Do We Solve Our Gigantic Contemporary Problems? By Stephanie Ruskay](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/lessons-from-kohelet/)
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Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) is read during Sukkot, and at this moment I'm finding it to be precisely the wisdom I need. When I feel worried about the many crises we face, the idea that there is nothing new under the sun can be comforting. To me it means we have what we need to address the problem. We need to have humility and consider the tools God has given us and those humans have developed over time. Our main task is to find the right formula. Though breakthrough discoveries and new inventions exist, often what we seek is the right old tool in the proper configuration. It is a question of titration.

When confronted with challenges I ask: When did this last happen? What did people do then, and what could we learn from it? We ask this in the Division of Religious Leadership and in the Hendel Center for Ethics and Justice. We stand on the shoulders of those who did our jobs before us. They spotted trends, observed demographic shifts, and responded to the times in light of the past. Were those times so different from ours? I suspect the details are different, but the underlying melody is often the same.

History frequently feels like it follows the swing of a pendulum. We go to an extreme, and just when we think we have witnessed or participated in enormous change, the pendulum starts swinging the other way.

There is nothing new under the sun. וְאֵין כֵּל-חֲדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ:

This is true in rabbinical and cantorial education.

It is true in multifaith and justice work.

It is true in war and peace.

It is true about race relations in the US.

It is true about women's rights in the US.

As our colleague Hazzan Natasha Hirschhorn says, these times are unprecedented, here we go again.

The Broadway musical *Suffs*, about the suffragists who worked for women in the US to have the right to vote, is an interesting juxtaposition to *Kohelet*. The main character, Alice Paul, sings about a march she is imagining into reality in Washington, DC, right before President Wilson's inauguration. She sings, "How do we do what's never been done, how will we find a way, find a way?"

On the one hand, marches were not a new invention. On the other, the right size, scale, and timing for the march was essential. It was titration. They needed the right formula.

In the show, women try different strategies to achieve the vote. Some suppressed their inner rage and made themselves palatable for the men in power. Others took to the streets, understanding that no amount of self-contortion would move the men to share power. They acted radically and did not conform. Some tried to minimize the size of the request and ask women of color to wait their turn. Others said we all get the vote, or nobody does.

Though they took different positions, the women could all feel they played a role in achieving the amendment granting women the right to vote. It was probably a combination of the harsh and the gentle tactics. Each person had to figure out which role they could best play, but they were all necessary.

In the seasons of our own lives, we feel pulled toward some types of work rather than others. During my career there were periods when I felt called to multifaith work. I worked at a Presbyterian seminary, Auburn Theological Seminary, during rabbinical school. I felt we could be better Jews if we were in close relationship with people who worshiped and believed differently from us. It helped give me perspective and appreciation for my own tradition.

Then I had a period of justice work primarily in the Jewish community. Expanding our practice to include justice work as a religious expression on par with other halakhic obligations felt essential. I came to JTS for that reason: to help shape us for this moment of justice work in the world, as observant Jews.

Suddenly, or not suddenly—a war in Israel and Gaza has interrupted everything else.

Does the wisdom of *Kohelet* speak to us today? *Kohelet* teaches that there is a time for fighting and a time for peacemaking. Thematically, reading *Kohelet* on

Sukkot, when things are fragile, can remind us that however we feel now will not be permanent. The time for whatever we are doing now will pass. We will have to “find a way, find a way,” in the words of Alice Paul.

לְכֹל זְמַן וְעֵת לְכָל־חֶפֶץ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם: אִם

עֵת לִלְדוֹת וְעֵת לָמוּת וְעֵת לִטְעַת וְעֵת לְעֵקוֹר נְטוּעַ:

עֵת לְהַרְוֹג וְעֵת לְרַפֹּא וְעֵת לְפָרוֹץ וְעֵת לְבָנוֹת:

עֵת לְבַכּוֹת וְעֵת לְשִׂחוֹק עֵת סִפּוֹד וְעֵת רִקּוֹד:

עֵת לְהִשְׁלִיךְ אֲבָנִים וְעֵת כְּנוּס אֲבָנִים עֵת לְחַבּוֹק וְעֵת לְרַחֵק מִחֲבֵק:

עֵת לְבַקֵּשׁ וְעֵת לְאַבֵּד עֵת לְשָׁמוֹר וְעֵת לְהִשְׁלִיךְ:

עֵת לְקַרְוֵעַ וְעֵת לְחַפּוֹר עֵת לְחַשׂוֹת וְעֵת לְדַבֵּר:

וְעֵת לְאַהֲבַי וְעֵת לְשֹׂא עֵת מִלְחָמָה וְעֵת שְׁלוֹם: אִם

A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven: A time for being born and a time for dying, A time for planting and a time for uprooting the planted; A time for slaying and a time for healing, A time for tearing down and a time for building up; A time for weeping and a time for laughing, A time for wailing and a time for dancing; A time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones, A time for embracing and a time for shunning embraces; A time for seeking and a time for losing, A time for keeping and a time for discarding; A time for ripping and a time for sewing, A time for silence and a time for speaking; A time for loving and a time for hating; A time for war and a time for peace. (3:1-8)

To my surprise this has again seemed like a time for multifaith work. The Jewish people alone are small and insignificant in number compared to the number of people in the world. Perhaps this is the time to be catalyzers of coming together.

This moment is calling me to try to warm up relationships across faith lines. It is inspiring me to seek out colleagues in the seminaries and schools with which we share Morningside Heights. Covid and then the start of the war chilled old relationships. People changed jobs. Suddenly it felt like we didn't have people to call on at the precise moment when we needed each other.

In Jewish tradition, reaching back to the Kabbalists in the 16th century we have had the custom to invite people into our sukkah as guests, ushpizin in Aramaic. This year, the ushpizin we are inviting to the JTS sukkah are multifaith and civic leaders. We are reaching out and connecting. This past year (and its many curses)

was filled with small and large acts of protest, fighting, and aggression. The war has not ended. Most people have changed some. For many of us, we have done it in isolation from our multifaith partners. All of us who are alive are wounded in some way. We are ready to reassess our tools and choose a different one than we have been using recently. But which one? The one I am grasping is reaching across the streets and welcoming people into our temporary dwelling. Looking for ways to mend or build relationships. We are not pretending this is a blank slate. We are saying that being together and creating new bonds is essential to building peace.

There is truly nothing new under the sun. Since Abraham, Jews have been welcoming strangers into their tents, practicing the mitzvah of hakhnasat orhim. Now is the time for each of us to take a step and reach out, particularly if we are nervous about doing so.

Having just marked the first anniversary of October 7 and now approaching Shemini Atzeret and Simhat Torah, there is much to despair. We never thought we would reach this terrible anniversary.

And so, like the characters in Suffis, we continue working on the same issues as our predecessors; we extend them grace for the paths they took, and we note that our children and grandchildren will scrutinize how we managed and judge us, and then pick up the mantle and lead.

This is a time to look deeply at our history and determine which of the tools our people have used throughout our history might suit today's world.

Whichever tool you think it is now time to pick up, please do not tarry. As we learn from the writer Grace Paley, "The only recognizable feature of hope is action."

(Stephanie Ruskay is Associate Dean of the Rabbinical School, JTS)

[Sukkot: Clinging to Possibility in the Face of Obstacles by Rabbi Jessica Fisher
https://truah.org/resources/jessica-fisher-sukkot-moraltorah_2024_/](https://truah.org/resources/jessica-fisher-sukkot-moraltorah_2024_/)

It is difficult to find the joy of this *zman simchateinu* (time of our rejoicing) that comes on the heels of a year permeated by grief, suffering, and violence. There are voices in our tradition that anticipated such moments, that knew there would be days that would seem impossible to celebrate, and asked us to mark these days nonetheless to preserve the possibility of joy. These texts urge us to begin 5785 with renewed commitments to advocacy, collective action, and mutual support – even in moments where these efforts feel ineffective – for the sake of the possibility that they might work.

There is a text at the beginning of tractate Sukkah (**Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 2a**) that instructs us to act even when the desired outcome seems unachievable.

One of the requirements of a sukkah is to enjoy shade that comes specifically from the roof rather than the walls. But in the text, the sage Abaye asks, what if a sukkah is built in a valley? In such a sukkah the mountains are almost like high walls and the shade would come from the mountains, not the roof.

Rabbi Zeira permits this sukkah because if the mountains were removed, the shade would come from the roof as it should. We can build sukkot in the shadow of a mountain as if the mountains weren't there at all.

Rabbi Sarah Krinsky explains, "There are moments – times and places – where it feels like the shade, the darkness, is never-ending. And where the mountains feel too tall, too entrenched, to ever move. Even so, our Talmud teaches, we keep building toward the possibility of light."

The rabbis of the Talmud knew there would be times when we would have no choice but to build our sukkot beneath a thick shadow cast by mountains. They knew there would be moments when it would feel audacious to build a sukkah at all.

This year, the mountains have certainly felt too tall, and building sukkot – let alone rejoicing in them and enjoying their shade – seems like it should be prohibited. And yet, just as Rabbi Zeira authorizes us to build sukkot beneath unmovable mountains, we must persist in pursuing peace and in strengthening our communities of care even when our efforts feel futile.

The option to build sukkot in valleys reminds us that even when we live in a darkness that seemingly cannot be overcome, we must cling to the possibility that the mountains and their shadows will move. As Rebecca Solnit writes, "Hope is not a door, but a sense that there might be a door at some point, some way out of the problems of the present moment even before that way is found or followed." (*Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*) A sukkah built in a valley reminds us to hope for a different future each time we step over its threshold.

As we build and inhabit our sukkot this week, may we be inspired and reenergized by these precarious structures of possibility and hope. (*Rabbi Jessica Fisher is the director of rabbinic enrichment at the Shalom Hartman Institute. Jessica previously served as a rabbi at Beth El Synagogue Center in New Rochelle, NY, and now lives in Greensboro, NC.*)

[The Fantastic Four:](#)

[What is the Meaning of the Four Species? Or are there many possible meanings?](#)

[By Stuart Halpern](#)

Though not as intoxicating as Passover, with its four cups of wine, Sukkot also boasts a trademark quartet, known as the four species. The lulav (palm branch), hadas (myrtle), aravah (willow), and etrog (citron) are held, and ritually shaken, at various points during the holiday's seven days of prayer services. What exactly these simple items symbolize, however, has been debated for millennia.

Modern scholars have understood the four species to represent the four types of ecosystems in the land of Israel: The date palm grows near valley springs, myrtle on the mountains, willows near rivers, and citrons in the coastal plains.

Some have even added an aquatic element. The contemporary Rabbi Zelig Golden has noted they all either require significant water to grow or are found only where perennial water is available. Together, Golden noted, “they provide something akin to an ecological divining bundle, grown from the previous year’s rainfall and ritually used to invoke rains for the year to come.” The Talmud’s Rabbi Eliezer had, centuries earlier, suggested, “The lulav and the other species taken with it, come only to offer appeasement for water, as they symbolize the rainfall of the coming year. And this symbolism is as follows: Just as these four species cannot exist without water ... so, too, the world cannot exist without water.”

Never satisfied with a simple explanation, however, the sages saw boundless possibilities in this bundle of plants and fruit.

Perhaps the species each symbolize God Himself, suggests one opinion in the midrashic collection known as Vayikra Rabbah. Parsing each phrase of the biblical commandment in Leviticus’ 23rd chapter that lists each species, it explains:

“The fruit of a pleasant [hadar] tree [the etrog]”—this is the Holy One blessed be He, in whose regard it is written: “You are clothed in splendor and glory [hadar]” (Psalms 104:1).

“Branches of date palms”—this is the Holy One blessed be He, in whose regard it is written: “The righteous blossoms like a date palm” (Psalms 92:13).

“A bough of a leafy tree”—this is the Holy One blessed be He, as it is written: “He stands among the myrtle shrubs” (Zechariah 1:8).

“Willows of [ve’arvei] the brook”—this is the Holy One blessed be He, in whose regard it is written: “Praise Him who rides in the highest heavens [baaravot], whose name is the Lord” (Psalms 68:5).

The species symbolize not God, but the patriarchs, piped up another rabbi: Abraham, like the etrog, was pleasant in old age. Isaac had been bound on the altar, like those branches of the date palms. Jacob teemed with sons like a leafy bough. And Joseph died before his 11 brothers, as the willow withers early.

Nonsense. The four species are the matriarchs, someone else murmured: Sarah was beautiful in her old age, like the citron. Rebecca produced the righteous Jacob and the wicked Esau, as a date palm has both edible fruit and thorns. It was Leah who birthed all those sons. And Rachel, alas, died before her sister.

Couldn’t be, another voice shouted out from the beit midrash: The etrog is

obviously the Great Sanhedrin, that great rabbinic court, filled with wizened, pleasant old sages. The date palms, blowing with the wind, are Torah scholars, who bend in humility as they learn from one another. The boughs of leafy myrtle trees are the three rows of students who sit before them. The willows of the brook are the two judges who record their decisions.

Perhaps the species are the nation of Israel itself, with all its societal subgroups, came a soft whisper: Bearing a good taste and strong fragrance, the etrog embodies the Jews who have Torah and act properly. The date palm, with its taste but no fragrance, represents those who claim religiosity but act criminally. The myrtle—all fragrance, no taste—is the ethical agnostic, acting properly without a commitment to Torah. The willows have neither religious commitment nor ethical inclinations. By ritually taking them together, hand in hand, God in essence declared, “Let them all be bound together in a single bundle and they will atone for one another.”

Consider one’s own self, beckoned the final speaker. Each of the species is a body part. As the anonymous medieval work the Sefer HaChinuch elaborates, “the citron is similar to the heart, which is the dwelling place of the intellect,” a reminder to be mindful of heaven; “the lulav is similar to the backbone, which is the essence of a person, to hint that he should straighten himself completely for His service.” Myrtle leaves are similar to eyes, a reminder not to be led astray by inappropriate temptations. And the willow leaves are similar to the lips, a hint to calibrate our words and fear God, “even at a time of joy.”

The four species remind us that constituting true community requires a cacophony of ideas, commitments, and character traits. Whether one sees the species as agricultural samples or reflections of Providence, ancient ancestors or a polity, scholastic sentiments, or meditations on the nature of personhood, what matters is that they, and we, are bound together, held amid a prayer for more hopeful days ahead. *(Rabbi Dr. Stuart Halpern is Senior Adviser to the Provost of Yeshiva University and Deputy Director of Y.U.’s Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought. His books include The Promise of Liberty: A Passover Haggada, which examines the Exodus story’s impact on the United States, Esther in America, Gleanings: Reflections on Ruth and Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land: The Hebrew Bible in the United States.)*

Chag Sameach - חג שמחה

Yahrtzeits

Rich Cohen remembers his father William Cohen on Friday October 18th

Bob Woog remembers his father Cornelius M. Woog on Friday October 18th

