

Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

Five days after Yom Kippur comes the longest string of holidays on the Jewish calendar. This string begins on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Tishri with the seven day holiday of ***Sukkot*** (sometimes pronounced Succos) or the “Festival of Booths”. Next is a holiday called ***Shemini Atzeret***, the “Eighth Day of Assembly” and lastly, ***Simchat Torah*** (sometimes pronounced Simchas Torah), or “Rejoicing in the Torah”. These holidays are a time of rejoicing and celebration and have a much different mood from the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur “High Holidays” which have just passed.

SUKKOT

History:

- Agriculturally, *Sukkot* celebrates the fall harvest as described in the Bible. Some think that *Sukkot* was a model for the American holiday of Thanksgiving.
- *Sukkot* is a remembrance of the time when the Jews wandered in the wilderness after being freed from bondage in Egypt in Biblical times.

Customs and Observances:

- ***The Sukkah***



- A temporary booth or hut called a *sukkah* is built in the backyard, on a patio or balcony and often outside the synagogue.
- The *sukkah* symbolizes the hut that Jewish farmers temporarily lived in to be close to their crops during the harvest season in ancient Israel. It also symbolizes the huts that the Jews lived in as they wandered in the desert following the biblical exodus from Egypt.
- A *sukkah* is a temporary “dwelling”. It must have at least three walls and must have a roof open enough to the sky to see the stars. The roof might be made from wood, bamboo, tree branches or other natural material.
- *Sukkahs* are built at many CJE sites for the clients and

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residents.

- Meals are traditionally eaten in the *sukkah* for the entire seven days and some people even sleep in their *sukkah*.
- Candles are lit and special blessings are said to begin the holiday on the first two evenings of *Sukkot*.
- Customarily, a round *challah* bread is served and the *Kiddush* prayer is said over the wine or grape juice before each meal.



o ***Lulav and Etrog***

- In the synagogue and at home a *lulav* and *etrog* are waved. The *lulav* is a palm branch surrounded by sprigs of willow and myrtle. The *etrog* is a lemon like fruit, called a citron in English. They are held together, blessed and shaken in a particular way. This symbolizes thanks to God for the bounty that has been provided us.
- CJE will provide *lulav* and *etrog* plants for residents to use at Lieberman, Gidwitz, Robineau and Adult Day Services.



Religious Services

- o Many people attend religious services in the synagogue on the first two days of *Sukkot*. CJE conducts services for the holidays at Lieberman Center and Weinberg Community for those who wish to attend.

Shemini Atzeret

Customs and Observances:

Following *Sukkot*, the 8th day is a holiday with its own unique name: *Shemini Atzeret*. Although this day is not technically a part of *Sukkot*, the two celebrations run together. The meaning of the name of the holiday is not really clear. It is usually translated as the Eighth Day of Assembly.

Although similar in some ways, there are significant differences between the two back-to-back holidays of *Sukkot* & *Shemini Atzeret*. First, there is no more shaking of the *lulav* and *etrog*. Secondly, although some people continue to eat meals and recite *Kiddush* in the *sukkah*, it is no longer required. Finally, most synagogue communities will recite the memorial prayer (*Yizkor*) as a part of the *Shemini Atzeret* morning religious service.

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- Many people attend religious services in the synagogue on these days.
 - *Yizkor*, the special memorial service said in remembrance of family members no longer alive, is said in synagogue, as part of the morning religious service on this day. CJE will have these services at Lieberman Center and Weinberg Community for those who wish to attend.
- **Memorial Candle for *Yizkor***
A memorial candle or light is traditionally lit the evening before the holiday in the home to help remember and honor those who have passed. Because it is prohibited to light real flames in resident rooms and apartments at Lieberman Center and Weinberg Community, CJE residents may request electric memorial light to turn on in their room.

Simchat Torah

Simchat Torah which means, "Rejoicing in the Torah", is celebrated the day after Shemini Atzeret for most Conservative and Orthodox Jews. Reform Jews and Jews who live in Israel celebrate this holiday on the same day as Shemini Atzeret. The Torah contains the first five books of the Hebrew Bible and is sometimes called the Five Books of Moses.

Customs and Observances:

- *Simchat Torah* marks the end of the yearly cycle of readings from the *Torah* and the beginning of the next cycle. The last scriptural reading of the *Torah* is read aloud in the synagogue, followed by the first scripture reading. This shows how the cycle of the reading of the *Torah* is never ending. All the *Torah* scrolls are taken out and paraded in seven processions, called *hakafot*, around the synagogue accompanied by much singing and dancing. Often children carry flags and miniature *Torah* scrolls. This is a festive celebration, which may even spill out into the streets.

Sukkot*, *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah are not as widely celebrated by the general Jewish community as the High Holidays of *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. For all who do observe them, these holidays are as important as others celebrated during the year. While they are joyous holidays, some may feel sad at these times, prompted by memories of past family holiday

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gatherings and friends and family no longer present. Some may also feel the effects of losses more intensely at this time of year, especially as they say the *Yizkor* memorial prayers. CJE staff allow clients and residents to share reminiscences about the holidays which can be a healthy way to allow them to express their feelings about the holidays.

Proper greetings for this joyous holiday period are, the Hebrew *Chag Sameach* (Happy Holiday), or the Yiddish, *Gut Yontif* (Good Holiday) or just plain "Happy Holiday".

For more information check out this great on-line resource:

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Sukkot.shtml

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Shemini_AtzeretSimchat_Torah.shtml

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