



# Sukkot



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*Sukkot*, one of the major festivals on the Jewish calendar, begins five days after *Yom Kippur*. The name of this holiday is derived from the Hebrew word “sukkah,” which means “temporary hut” or “booth,” referring to the temporary dwellings the Jewish people lived in during their 40 years of wandering in the desert following the Exodus from Egypt.

By remembering – and re-enacting – their life in flimsy huts, we have a heightened awareness of major themes of the holiday: our lives are fragile, G-d is the source of our blessings, and we must be grateful for these blessings.

In the spirit of re-enacting the life of the Jewish people in those huts 3,000 years ago, it is traditional to live in the *sukkah* as much as possible, especially by eating meals and spending leisure time in it. Some people also sleep in the *sukkah* during the holiday.

One famous tradition of the holiday is holding and waving four species of plants during special holiday prayers. One symbolic meaning of this *mitzvah* (commandment) is that each of these varieties of plants corresponds to one part of our body: *lulav* (palm branch), the spine; *hadassim* (myrtle branches), the eyes; *aravot* (willow branches), the lips; and *etrog* (citron), the heart. By holding them together, we are reminded to express our Jewish beliefs in actions, see the world through the lens of Jewish values, be careful and respectful with the words we speak, and have a caring and compassionate heart.

In his book *The Jewish Way*, Rabbi Irving Greenberg shares a profound insight on the difference between Passover and *Sukkot*: “The Jews rose to the Exodus occasion with a great act of heroism – departing. [But] the real achievement of freedom does not come in one day; there is no quick cure for slavery. The liberated person is the one who learns to accept the daily challenges of existence as the expression of self-fulfillment and responsibility. *Sukkot* commemorates the maturation of the Israelites, achieved not in crossing the Red Sea but in walking the long way to freedom.”

