



To help enrich your appreciation of the upcoming holiday, Kolel is happy to provide this “fact sheet.” We hope it helps you prepare both spiritually and physically. Please feel free to study with us any time at www.kolel.org or at any of our classes at the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre, the Bathurst Jewish Community Centre, or the Family Resource Centre at the Promenade. You can reach us at 416-636-1880 ext 255.

SUKKOT/SIMCHAT TORAH

WHAT IS IT?

The Feast of Booths and the Festival of Rejoicing in the Torah

Sukkot=booths

Simchat Torah=Joy of the Torah

Pronounced in Hebrew “Sookot” with a long o in “kot” and the accent on “kot”; and “Seem-chat Torah” with the accent on “chat” and “rah.” (The “ch” sound is guttural, **not** the English “ch” as in “cheese.”) Pronounced in Yiddish/English (Yinglish!) “Sukkus” with the accent on “su” and “Simchus Toy-rah” with the accent on “chus” and “toy.” Sometimes spelled **Succot** or **Succhoth** (the “t” at the end of Hebrew words is sometimes transliterated as th, like in the word “mitzvoth.”)

WHY IS IT?

The children of Israel dwelt in booths in the wilderness after the Exodus. At the same time, they celebrated the “festival of the ingathering” of the harvest. Sukkot is the holiday which brings together those two themes, one historical and one agricultural. Sukkot concludes (and thus the “high holy day cycle”) on the eighth day with Shemini Atzeret, then Simchat Torah when we end the cycle of Torah readings for the year with the last portion in Deuteronomy and begin again with the first portion of Genesis.

WHEN IS IT?

The fifteenth of the Hebrew month Tishre. In Israel and abroad in Orthodox and Conservative congregations eight days are observed; the first two and last two are festivals with no work permitted. In Israel Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are celebrated together on the same day. Most Reform and Reconstructionist congregations observe seven days with the first and last being a festival with no work.

WHERE IS IT FROM?

Sukkot is a Biblical festival. Leviticus 23:42 commands us to “dwell in booths” for seven days to remember the booths we built and lived in on the journey from Egypt to the Promised

Land of Israel. Numbers 29:35 describes Shemini Atzeret, the last day, as a “solemn assembly.”

WHAT DO WE DO?

Many families build a temporary Sukkah (booth) in their backyard, on their roof or on their porch. They eat (and some sleep) in the Sukkah for the entire 7/8 days. This reminds us of the temporary nature of our lives and makes us grateful for our safe, solid homes, as the Sukkah may not have a roof but needs to have an open top where one can see the sky. Sukkot also helps connect us to the earth and our responsibility to protect it. Many synagogues are decorated with symbols of the harvest like pumpkins and gourds. A lulav (green fronds made up of myrtle, palm and willow leaves) and an etrog (a special citrus fruit that looks like a lemon) are waved in a ritual pattern each morning except Shabbat. On Simchat Torah the last portion and first portion of the Torah are read with special honours going to the person chosen to bless those portions. Children are given sweets and flags to march around the sanctuary, and the Torah scrolls are paraded for seven circuits of joyous dancing and singing. A memorial candle is lit on the evening of the last night and special memorial prayers (“yizkor”) are said in the synagogue on the last day.

WHAT DO WE EAT?

Since Sukkot celebrates the autumn harvest (similar to the Thanksgiving holiday which is not coincidental), holiday menus may include dishes like stuffed vegetables, to represent a cornucopia of bounty. There is an Ashkenazic tradition of serving kreplach (stuffed pastries like perogies) or stuffed cabbage and a Sephardic tradition of serving couscous, with an accompanying variety of vegetables and toppings.

WHAT DO WE SAY?

“Chag Sameach” (pronounced chag sah-may-ach) meaning “happy holiday” used the first and last days; some people say “mo-ah-dim l’simcha” (“a joyous festival”) in the intermediate days, whose response is “chagim u’z’manim l’sasson.”