

SUCCOT (AND SIMCHAT TORAH)

by Associate Rabbi Danny Burkeman

This is one of the most joyful days in the Jewish calendar as we celebrate the completion of a cycle of Torah readings, and begin all over again (when researching this festival on the internet, remember that there is a difference in the dating of Simchat Torah in Israel, in Reform communities and in Orthodox Diaspora communities).

Below you will find a few articles, from a variety of Jewish websites, about Succot, its rituals and significance within the Jewish calendar. This time we're also including a page to visit with children to play some Succot games and make decorations for your (or the synagogue's) succah.

For each article you will find a brief overview of what is included in the article and a couple of thoughts for reading the website.

- **AN INTRODUCTION TO SUCCOT AND SIMCHAT TORAH**

http://www.kolel.org/pages/holidays/Sukkot_intro.html

Kolel provides a very comprehensive introduction to the festival of Succot, and when you click on Simchat Torah at the top of the page you get all of the information for this festival as well. Almost every element of the festival is covered on these pages.

Critical question: As is made clear Succot is a festival which is linked to the agricultural cycle. How do we city-dwellers relate to an agricultural festival? (Note: Kolel describes itself as a place of Liberal Jewish learning; it is a pluralistic, egalitarian institution)

- **THE LULAV AND ETROG** (the four species of Succot)

<http://joi.org/celebrate/sukkot/species.shtml>

This includes an overview of the four species. It includes headings over each column, which offer different interpretations of the four species which are taken together and shaken on the festival of Succot.

Critical question: Which of the interpretations of the four species do you most connect with? What do you think the significance of waving the species is? Further viewing: For a funny video of people shaking the lulav (not the kosher way at all! visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EC4lVe61p-0>) (Note: JOI is The Jewish Outreach Institute works on Jewish outreach across America)

- **THE USHPIZIN – Visitors to our Succah**

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Sukkot/Overview_Sukkot_at_Home/Sukkah/Ushpizin_669.htm

On Succot there is a tradition of seven esteemed guests from Jewish history who visit our succah on each day of the festival. This article considers the seven guests, and their female counterparts who have been introduced more recently.

Critical question: What can we learn from the idea that we are visited by these guests during Succot? How can we extend hospitality over the festival of Succot? Further viewing: There is a very interesting and enjoyable Israeli film entitled: Ushpizin, which plays with some of the ideas related to the festival of Succot. (Note: MyJewishLearning is a trans-denominational Jewish website)

- **WHY DO WE SIT IN THE SUCCAH**

http://judaism.about.com/od/sukko1/a/sukkah_golinkin.htm

This article includes a number of the different reasons given for us to sit in the succah, beginning with those found in the Bible, and moving through a number of Rabbis from throughout the ages (ending with a reason from the article's author).

Critical question: Will you be sitting in a succah this year? What is the reason that you

sit in the succah? Will you sit in the succah differently after reading this article? (Note: This website is part of The New York Times Company. The author Rabbi Professor David Golinkin is a prominent Conservative Rabbi)

- **SUCCOT AND SOCIAL ACTION**

http://www.socialaction.com/education_resources/jewish_holidays/sukkot/Family_Action_Sukkot.shtml

When we live in our temporary succah over the festival of Succot, it is inevitable that we think of some of those people who are less fortunate than us, and forced to live in temporary dwellings on a permanent basis. This article offers some social action suggestions related to the festival of Succot.

Critical question: How can we keep the lessons of Succot with us for the whole Jewish year? What do you take as the lesson of dwelling in the succah? (Note: Socialaction.com is a Jewish website focussed on Jewish social action, and supported by Jewish Family and Life)

- **ECCLESIASTES AND THE FESTIVAL OF SUCCOT**

<http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=2471>

As with most festivals there is a special Biblical reading attached to the festival of Succot. On Succot traditionally we read the Book of Ecclesiastes (Kohelet), this page includes suggestions for around the table study of this Biblical Book.

Critical question: What do you think is the central lesson of the book of Ecclesiastes? Further Reading: To find the full Hebrew and English text of Ecclesiastes visit: <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt3101.htm> (Note: The Union for Reform Judaism, the American equivalent of the Movement for Reform Judaism)

- **CHILDREN AND SUCCOT**

<http://www.babaganewz.com/holidays/index.cfm?cat=23&sub=sukkotcentral>

When you visit this website you will find a variety of activities for your children related to the festival of Succot.. These include the possibility of visiting a virtual succah and building your own on-line succah.

Critical question: It is not possible for everyone to build a full-size succah, but how can we ensure that we and our children are involved in the building of a full-size or mini-succah of some description?