

## AN EXERCISE FOR ALL FAITHS & BACKGROUNDS

Reflect on the abundance in your life. For what are you truly grateful? Try keeping a gratitude journal for a week.

Rain is what nourishes the earth. Reflect on what nourishes you: Family? Hobbies? Something else?

Visit the PJCC lobby, take the lulav and etrog in both hands and shake it in all directions. Offer your own private prayer or wish as you do so.



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*The PJCC is proud to be a part of the Koret Initiative on Jewish Peoplehood. We are honored to present this program through the Taube Center for Jewish Peoplehood at the PJCC.*

Jewish Life

## A Guide to Sukkot • Sh'mini Atzeret Simchat Torah



### Sukkot

Sundown, Wednesday, October 16–Nightfall, Friday, October 25

### Sh'mini Atzeret

Sundown, Wednesday, October 23–Nightfall, Thursday, October 24

### Simchat Torah

Sundown, Thursday, October 24–Nightfall, Friday, October 25





## Sukkot

*Sukkot* is known as *Z'man simchateinu*, the festival of our greatest joy. Just five days after the spiritual peak of *Yom Kippur*, we re-enter the more physical realm and acknowledge both the impermanence and abundance of the natural world.

Sukkot is named in honor of the *sukkah*, an outdoor booth or hut, a reminder of how the Israelites sheltered themselves after they fled slavery from Egypt. It also resembles temporary shelters used by farmers during harvest seasons. The *sukkah* reminds us that everything in life is subject to change, that nothing is solid, and there is much in life we cannot control. The *sukkah* has an open roof made of branches to let in shade, shadows, and moonlight, as well as an open side to symbolically (and literally) welcome guests.

In the Torah, the first Jews, Abraham and Sarah, greet some unexpected guests who arrive at their tent and work to make them comfortable. From this story we learn the mitzvah of welcoming guests, or *hachnasat orchim*, which is not just about inviting people in, but also making them feel honored, relaxed, and at home. The simplicity of dwelling in the *sukkah* refocuses our minds on the important things in life – relationships, shelter and security, connection with nature—and loosens our preoccupations with the material possessions of the modern world.

### How We Celebrate

Sukkot traditions embrace the beauty of the season with the building of a temporary *sukkah* in the backyard. A *sukkah* is meant to be simple—it requires only two and a half walls and a roof made of natural materials such as branches or bamboo rods. The roof, called *s'chach* (from the same word for *sukkah*), provides both shade and shelter, yet still allows for a view of the sky. Decorating the *sukkah* is an exciting and empowering time for family and friends, children and grownups alike. All eight days of the holiday, people are encouraged to eat their meals, study, and schmooze in the *sukkah*—some even bring a sleeping bag and camp out overnight!

Another central custom of Sukkot is to bind together four plant species: a small bouquet of willow and myrtle branches with a palm frond, together called a *lulav*, alongside a lemon-like citron called an *etrog*. Jewish wisdom teaches that these four different species represent different senses, character traits, or kinds of people, amongst other metaphors. Each day we say a special blessing for the *lulav* and *etrog* and shake the bundle, pointing them in six directions to symbolize the oneness of all creation. Please visit our PJCC Sukkah in the Hamlin Garden to try out this ritual anytime this week!



## Sh'mini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

### Sh'mini Atzeret

The day after Sukkot is known as *Sh'mini Atzeret*. Jewish tradition teaches that the People of Israel were so joyous on Sukkot that they wanted to have one more day for celebration. *Simchat Torah* extends the theme of joy for even another day. In Israel and in liberal Jewish communities throughout the world, Sh'mini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are celebrated on the same day; in more traditional communities, they are two distinct holidays.

This holiday includes a special prayer for rain. As Californians, we can empathize with the ancient anxiety of having enough rain for another year of crops to survive. The Hebrew word for rain, *geshem*, is connected to the word for physicality, *gashmiyut*, reminding us of the primacy of water in our own bodies, our food systems, and our planet's overall health.

### Simchat Torah

Simchat Torah celebrates the end and the beginning of the annual Torah reading cycle. The Torah is the primary Jewish sacred text—the Five Books of Moses—and is read from a scroll over the course of the year. On Simchat Torah, the last few verses of Deuteronomy are read consecutively with the first chapter of Genesis. It is a powerful moment to chant the story of the death of Moses immediately followed by hearing the story of Creation. A typical Simchat Torah celebration in a synagogue includes singing, dancing, and parading with the Torah scrolls, as well as a chance for anyone present to see the Torah up close. The Torah is referred to as a Tree of Life, giving sustenance, connection, and meaning to anyone who comes into relationship with its teachings.

