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Report No. 403

Jewish Holy Days: Sukkot, Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah

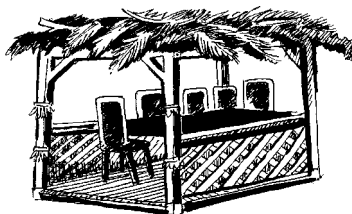
Reference should be made to Report No. 401, “Religious Laws Generally Applicable to Biblically-Mandated Jewish Holy Days,” and Report 401A, “Ritual Items Generally Required for All Biblically-Mandated Jewish Holy Days,” for information concerning religious laws applicable to, and ritual items required for, *all* Biblically-mandated Jewish Holy Days, including all of the holidays mentioned in this report.:

Sukkot - Tishrei 15-16

Additional Ritual Items: “*Sukkah*” (temporary structure covered with branches, leaves or reeds in which all meals are eaten); “*Lulav & Etrog*” (special palm frond (bound with myrtle and willow) and citron used during prayer services).

Sukkot is a seven-day festival, also known as the “Feast of Tabernacles,” that follows shortly after the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The first two days are observed as full holidays and work proscriptions apply. The following five days are known as “*Hol Hamo'ed*” -- weekdays that retain some aspects of the festival, but during which some forms of work are permitted. CODE OF JEWISH LAW (“C.J.L.”) chs. 104-106. The seventh day (fifth of the intermediate days) is *Hoshanah Rabbah* -- which has a special observance of its own. C.J.L. ch. 138 §1-3.

Sukkot commemorates the Divine protection offered to the Israelites in the desert during their journey to the promised land. During this holiday, Jews are required to eat their meals in a temporary structure (the “*Sukkah*”) covered with branches, leaves or reeds. *See generally* C.J.L. chs. 134-135.



The Bible states (Leviticus 23:42): “*Basukot Teshvu Shivas Yomim*” (in booths ye shall dwell seven days), which means that one should dwell in the Sukkah seven days even as one dwells in a house during the whole year. Ideally, one should make the Sukkah the principal abode, and there one should eat, drink and study. If one prays privately, one should likewise pray in the Sukkah. C.J.L. ch. 135 §1.

The religious laws governing the construction of the sukka are beyond the scope of this report. It is designed to be a temporary booth, usually constructed from wood panels or canvas supported by posts. Its roof usually consists of dry branches, shrubs, bamboo stalks or slats of wood. The roof must be sufficiently dense to generate more shade than sunlight, but not so dense as to prevent rain from entering. Fortunately, a host of vendors and Hebrew book stores supply easy-to-assemble, ritually-acceptable prefabricated



About the Aleph Institute

In 1978, and on many additional occasions, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, of blessed memory, called for attention to the Jewish population in prisons. Rabbi Schneerson, who was the first religious leader in history honored with the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor, spoke publicly and published entire treatises dedicated to the moral, ethical, spiritual and educational needs for men and women in those and other institutional environments. For example, a person going through prison with meaning and growth—though very difficult—leaves as a better, more productive and balanced citizen. Thus, the creation of the Aleph Institute.

Since 1981, the Aleph Institute, under the direction of Rabbi Sholom D. Lipskar, has provided valuable services to assist chaplains and institutional staff in meeting the legitimate religious needs of Jewish men and women in their care. The Aleph Institute provides answers to questions about mandated religious practices and ritual materials for daily and holiday observances. Aleph’s staff, affiliated Rabbis and rabbinical students provide visitations to Jews in institutional environments around the country and to military bases around the world. Over the years, Aleph has also supplied hundreds of thousands of religious texts and ritual items for use by individuals and chapels.

Sukkahs, complete with walls and roofs (bamboo or slats).

Jews also are required to make blessings over four special species of fruits and plants on each of the seven days of the holiday (except on the Sabbath), as Sukkot is also an agricultural holiday. *See generally* C.J.L. ch. 136. The four species of plants used to celebrate the holiday are: (1) the *lulav* (palm branch); (2) the *etrog* (a lemon-like citron); (3) myrtle (3 branches); and (4) willow (2 branches). *Id.* The *etrog* is handled separately while the other three species are bound together, and are collectively referred to as the “*lulav*.” *Id.* §8. Certain special prayers are said each day with the four species in hand. C.J.L. ch. 137. Competent Rabbinic authority must be consulted when purchasing these four items. C.J.L. ch. 136 §§1-6. There are also specific religious rules governing the way the species are bound together. *See, e.g., id.* §8.

Hoshanah Rabbah - The Seventh Day of Sukkot

Additional Ritual Items: *Lulav & Etrog*; “*Hoshannas*”(5 willow branches apart from those bound in the Lulav)

This day closes the period of repentance that began on Rosh Hashanah. Tradition has made this day into a sequel to the Days of Awe (the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), thereby lengthening the period of penitence and postponing the day when final sentence is to be rendered.

Prayer services are shorter than those of the Sabbath and holidays, although special sections of the Torah are read and special prayers are said at morning services. Five willow branches separate from the two bound in the lulav are traditionally used during the morning prayer services and are beaten against the ground. *See generally* C.J.L. ch. 138 §§1-3.

Shemini Atzeret - Tishrei 22

The “eighth” day of Sukkot. In the Talmud it is written that “the eighth day [of Sukkot] is a separate festival,” so Sukkot is really observed as seven days, and Shemini Atzeret is observed as a separate holiday. It marks the beginning of the rainy season in Israel.

Shemini Atzeret is the last day that Jews are required to eat in the sukkah. C.J.L. ch. 138 §5. It and the following day, Simchat Torah, are Biblically-mandated holidays and work proscriptions apply.

Prayer services are similar to those of the Sabbath, with certain modifications and additions. Special sections of the Torah are read at morning services. It is traditional to make seven “*hakafot*” (processions) carrying the scrolls of the Torah amid dancing and rejoicing around the Synagogue. C.J.L. ch. 138.

Simchat Torah - Tishrei 23

“Simchat Torah” literally means “Rejoicing with the Torah,” and the holiday celebrates the conclusion and beginning of the yearly cycle of weekly readings from the Five Books of Moses. C.J.L. ch. 138 §7.

Prayer services are similar to those of the Sabbath, with certain modifications and additions. The last portion of the Torah scroll is read on this day. Immediately afterwards, the Torah is read again from the beginning of *Bereshit* (Genesis).

Festivities begin on the prior evening at prayer services. *Id.* It is traditional to make seven “*hakafot*” (processions) carrying the scrolls of the Torah while singing and dancing around the Synagogue, both during the evening and the next morning’s services. *Id.* Prayer services are unconventionally joyous, and every Jewish male, including children, is called up to make a blessing over the Torah. *Id.* §§8-9.

Citations to Jewish Law

Citations to Jewish law throughout this report are to Rabbi Solomon Ganzfried, CODE OF JEWISH LAW: KITZUR [ABRIDGED] SHULHAN ARUKH, A COMPILATION OF JEWISH LAWS AND CUSTOMS (translated by Hyman E. Goldin, LL.B., annotated revised edition, Hebrew Publishing Company 1993) (“C.J.L.”), a copy of which can be ordered through the Aleph Institute or from any Jewish Bookstore. Jewish law frowns upon the use of the actual word representing the Creator’s name. Accordingly, references in this report to the Creator are indicated as “G-d.”

Information in this report is excerpted from the INSTITUTIONAL HANDBOOK OF JEWISH PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE, published by the Aleph Institute and highly recommended to chaplains and institutional staff working with Jewish men and women. Copyright

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