

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Shabbat Chol Hamoed Sukkot
October 19, 2019 *** 20 Tishrei, 5780
[Aufruf for Daniel Heller & Lindsay Solomon](#)

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We **welcome all** to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

Today's Portions

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Shabbat Chol Hamoed Sukkot Torah in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1019831/jewish/Shabbat-Chol-Hamoed-Torah-Reading-in-a-Nutshell.htm

G-d agrees to Moses' request that His presence only dwell amongst the Jews. Moses requests to be shown G-d's glory. G-d agrees, but informs Moses that he will only be shown G-d's "back," not G-d's "face."

G-d tells Moses to carve new tablets upon which G-d will engrave the Ten Commandments. Moses takes the new tablets up to Mt. Sinai, where G-d reveals His glory to Moses while proclaiming His Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.

G-d seals a covenant with Moses, assuring him again that His presence will only dwell with the Jews. G-d informs the Jewish people that He will drive the Canaanites from before them. He instructs them to destroy all vestiges of idolatry from the land, not to make molten gods, to refrain from making any covenants with its current inhabitants, to sanctify male firstborn humans and cattle, and not to cook meat together with milk.

The Jews are commanded to observe the three festivals — including the holiday of Sukkot, "the festival of the ingathering, at the turn of the year." All males are commanded to make pilgrimage to "be seen by G-d" during these three festivals. The maftir, from the Book of Numbers, discusses the public offerings brought in the Temple on this day of Sukkot.

Shabbat Chol Hamoed Sukkot Haftarah in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1019866/jewish/Shabbat-Chol-Hamoed-Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The subject of the haftarah of this Shabbat is the war of Gog and Magog that will precede the Final Redemption. Its connection to the holiday of Sukkot is that according to tradition

the war will take place during the month of Tishrei, the month when the holiday of Sukkot falls. In addition, this war is identical to the one described in the fourteenth chapter of Zachariah, the haftorah read on the first day of Sukkot, which concludes by saying that the gentile survivors of this war will be required to go to Jerusalem every year on the holiday of Sukkot to pay homage to G-d.

The prophet describes Gog's war against Israel and G-d's furious response. G-d will send an earthquake, pestilence, great floods and hailstones and fire—utterly destroying Gog's armies.

"And I will reveal Myself in My greatness and in My holiness and will be recognized in the eyes of many nations, and they will know that I am the Lord. . . . I will make known My Holy Name in the midst of My people Israel, and I will no longer cause My Holy Name to be profaned, and the nations will know that I, the Lord, am holy in Israel."

The haftorah concludes by saying that the weaponry of the defeated armies of Gog will provide fuel for fire for seven years! The Jews "shall carry no wood from the fields nor cut down any from the forests, for they shall make fires from the weapons."

Food For Thought

Shabbat Chol Hamoed Sukkot: Drawing from the Wells by Rabbi Shoshana Cohen

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Zi-m7nVm5LTybMnPi9WriY-QwPd8whsf6eiYf2B81XI/edit>

The end of the Mishna in Sukkah (5:1-4) describes the Simchat Beit HaShoeva, the festival took place in the Temple during the holiday of Sukkot. It is described as a huge party, people dancing and singing all over the Azara, the part of the Temple accessible to non-priests. So many torches were lit in the Temple that the outermost reaches of Jerusalem were illuminated. Priests and Levites blew shofars and played background music; rabbis performed crazy juggling acts with lighted torches. The Temple was filled with such revelry that they needed to create special structures to keep the women and men separate. As the Mishna sums it up "one who has never seen Simchat Beit HaShoeva has never seen joy in their lives." But what exactly is being celebrated here? What lies behind this religiously-sanctioned (even strongly encouraged) crazy party in the Temple in which boundaries between holy and profane, male and female, sage and layperson, priest and Israelite are blurred?

In the mishna in Sukkah directly before the one describing the party (4:9) there is a description of the nisuch hamayim, the special water offering that is poured on the altar that also took place during Sukkot. And the Hebrew root of Shoeva, shin-aleph-vet, means to draw. Taken together, it would appear that the Simchat Beit HaShoeva, as Rashi and other explain, is really a festival of water-drawing. To support this explanation Rashi brings the famous verse in Isaiah 12, "u'sh'avtem mayim b'sasson / you shall draw water in joy."

Coming as it does after the completion of the previous year's harvest, Sukkot is a time, particularly in the Land of Israel, when water - rain in particular - starts to become a central concern. By living in sukkot we act out our physical vulnerability and place ourselves at the mercy of the heavens. Via the nisuch hamayim and the Simchat Beit HaShoeva, we joyfully pour out this precious resource on the altar in the hope that God, too, will freely and joyfully provide rain and ensure our physical sustenance.

There are, however, a couple problems with this reading of Simchat Beit HaShoeva. First, the use of the word beit (house or structure) is a little strange here. The drawing of the water for the nisuch hamayim takes place outside, at the Shiloach pool, not in any building or structure. So there is no literal "Beit HaShoeva." Additionally, in the description of the Simchat Beit HaShoeva itself there are torches and fire but no actual water. But what of the verse in Isaiah 12,, "u'sh'avtem mayim b'sasson / you shall draw water in joy?" The larger context of the verse suggests that we not understand "water" literally: (3) Therefore with joy you shall draw water out of the wells of salvation. (4) And in that

day shall ye say: 'Give thanks unto the LORD, proclaim His name, Declare His doings among the peoples.... (5) Sing unto the LORD; for He has done gloriously; This is made known in all the earth. (6) Cry aloud and shout, you inhabitant of Zion, For great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of you.'

If we read on we can see that this is a reference not to physical water-drawing but the spiritual water-drawing that will take place at a time of redemption. God's word will flow like water. As the Jerusalem Talmud explains (Sukkah 5a):

Why was its name "Beit HaShoeva" (The House of Drawing)? For it was from there that they drew the divine spirit (ruach hakodesh) named after (the verse in Isaiah) - "you will draw water in joy from the waters of redemption"... That is to tell you that the divine spirit only rests on those who are happy.

The drawing here is not of physical water but of spiritual sustenance, ruach hakodesh, and the "house" is not the location of the nisuch hamayim but the whole Temple. In this case the festivities in the Temple are about enjoying intimacy with the divine and creating the conditions necessary to experience revelation.

Throughout the month of Elul we have been saying in Psalm 27 several times a day, "one thing I have asked from the Lord, it is this I will request, to sit in the house of God all the days of my life, to gaze upon the glory of God and the visit God's sanctuary." The journey towards closeness and intimacy with God that started in Elul, that went through the awe of Rosh Hashana, that sent the High Priest alone into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, comes to a joyful and ecstatic culmination on Sukkot where we party, with each other and with God, in that very sanctuary where we wish to dwell all the days of our lives. (*Rabbi Cohen is a member of the Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*)

D'var Haftarah: An Affirmation of Justice by Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Zi-m7nVm5LTybMnPi9WrlY-QwPd8whsf6eiYf2B81XI/edit>

Ezekiel's prophecy of "Gog from Magog" is an eschatological prophecy, namely, it is a prophecy of the End of Days, a precursor to the End of Time. It is filled with violence and terror, pitting God against evil forces that want to destroy Israel and turn the world on its head. Of necessity, then, God must be victorious over these forces for Israel's sake and, more importantly, to retain His place as the Master of the World: "And I (God) will be magnified and hallowed (v'hitgadiltee v'hitkadishtee), and I will become known before the eyes of many nations and they will know that I am the Lord." (38:23)

This idea that God does battle over injustice and is victorious over it for the sake of maintaining a good name is a major theme of the prophecies of Ezekiel. Liturgically, this theme prompts an interesting liturgical question since, as you may have noticed, the two Hebrew words above serve as the source for the beginning of the Kaddish prayer: "Yitgadal v'yitkadash – magnified and hallowed". The question is particularly acute regarding the Mourner's Kaddish – Kaddish Yatom, since for the mourner, his or her existential experience is one of injustice, and it might even seem to them that God is the one responsible for the injustice.

A bit of liturgical history is in order before we get to this question. The earliest mention of Kaddish as a mourner's prayer is from 11th-12th century Ashkenaz (Germany). From there, this custom spread throughout the Jewish world. The idea behind it was one of Tziduk Hadin – an affirmation of the justice of what has happened. The mourner, at his or her lowest moments, is asked to reaffirm faith that God's ways are righteous and just, and in doing so the mourner reenters the faith community. In a sense, the Kaddish does the work of proclaiming Ezekiel's ideal.

This affirmation may seem like an odd fiction, especially where the death of the one we mourn is truly tragic. But when faced with the alternative, namely, wallowing in despair, affirming God's positive role in the world is offered as a more attractive alternative. The Jewish tradition, which has seen its share of tragedies, is life-affirming and optimistic. This optimism, founded on the idea that God created a world that is good and that life is

ultimately worthwhile, does not see despair and despondency as an option. Mourner's Kaddish serves as a reminder, then, that we are part of the mission to realize this vision in the world, both to perpetuate God's name and for the sake of those we mourn. (*Rabbi Silverstein is a member of the Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*)

Two Identities of Sukkot: Chol Hamoed Sukkot by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

<https://ots.org.il/shabbat-shalom-sukkot-5780/>

Efrat, Israel – One of the most picturesque and creative festivals of the year is the Festival of Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles) – when the entire family is involved in building and decorating a special “nature home” which will be lived in for an entire week. But what are we actually celebrating and what is the true meaning of the symbol of the sukka? Is it the sukka of our desert wanderings, the temporary hut which the Israelites constructed in the desert when they wandered from place to place? If so, then the sukka becomes a reminder of all of the exiles of Israel throughout our 4,000-year history, and our thanksgiving to God is for the fact that we have survived despite the difficult climates – the persecution and pogroms – which threaten to overwhelm us.

Or is the sukka meant to be reminiscent of the Divine “clouds of glory” which encompassed us in the desert with God's rays of splendor, the sanctuary which served as the forerunner of our Holy Temple in Jerusalem? In the Grace after Meals during the Sukkot festival we pray that “the Merciful One restore for us the fallen tabernacle of David,” which would certainly imply that the sukka symbolizes the Holy Temple. The Talmud (B.T. Succot 11) brings a difference of opinion between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer as to which of these options is the true significance of our celebration. I would like to attempt to analyze which I believe to be the true meaning and why.

The major biblical description of the festivals is found in Chapter 23 of the Book of Leviticus. There are two textual curiosities which need to be examined. The three festivals which were always considered to be our national festivals, and which also biblically appear as the “desert” festivals, are Pessah, Shavuot and Sukkot – commemorating when we left Egypt, when we received the Torah at Sinai and when we lived in desert booths. Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are more universal in nature and not at all related to the desert sojourn. It seems strange that in the biblical exposition of the Hebrew calendar Pessah and Shavuot are explained, after which comes Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and only at the conclusion of the description comes Sukkot. Now, of course one can argue that this is the way the months fall out on the calendar year! However, that too is strange. After all, the Israelites left Egypt for the desert; presumably they built their booths immediately after the Festival of Pessah. Would it not have been more logical for the order to be Pessah, Sukkot, Shavuot, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur?

Secondly, the Festival of Sukkot is broken up into two parts. Initially, the Torah tells us: “And the Lord spoke to Moses saying: on the fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Festival of Sukkot, seven days for God these are the Festivals of the Lord which you shall call holy convocations” (Leviticus 23:33-38). It would seem that these last words conclude the biblical description of the festivals and the Hebrew calendar. But then, in the very next verse, the Torah comes back again to Sukkot, as if for the first time: “but on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you gather in the crop of the land, you shall celebrate God's festival for a seven day period... You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree, the branches of date palms, twigs of a plaited tree (myrtle) and willows of brooks; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for a seven-day period... You shall dwell in booths for a seven-day period... so that your generations will know that I caused the people of Israel to dwell in booths when I took them from the Land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God” (ibid. Leviticus 23:39-44). Why the repetition? And if the Bible now wishes to tell us about the four species which we are to wave in all

directions in thanksgiving to God for his agricultural bounty, why was this verse not linked to the previous discussion of the Sukkot booths? And why repeat the booths again this second time?

I have heard it said in the name of the Vilna Gaon that this repetition of Sukkot with the commandment concerning the Four Species is introducing an entirely new aspect of the Sukkot festival: the celebration of our entering into the Land of Israel. Indeed, the great philosopher-legalist Maimonides explains the great joy of the festival of Sukkot as expressing the transition of the Israelites from the arid desert to a place of trees and rivers, fruits and vegetables, as symbolized by the Four Species (Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3 Chapter 43). In fact, this second Sukkot segment opens with the words, "But on the fifteenth day of the seventh month when you gather the crop of the land (of Israel), you shall celebrate this festival to the Lord."

Hence, there are two identities to the festival of Sukkot. On the one hand, it is a desert festival, alongside Pessah and Shavuot, which celebrates our desert wanderings and survivals while living in flimsy booths. From that perspective, perhaps it ought to have found its place immediately after Pessah in terms of the calendar and certainly before the description of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur in the biblical text. However, the second identity of Sukkot, the Four Species, which represent our conquest and inhabitation of our homeland and signal the beginning of redemption, belongs after Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur – the festivals of God's kingship over the world and his Divine Temple, which is to be "a house of prayer for all the nations." This aspect of Sukkot turns the sukka into rays of Divine splendor and an expression of the Holy Temple.

So which Sukkot do we celebrate? Both at the very same time! But when we sit in the sukka, are we sitting in transitory booths representative of our wandering or rather in a Divine sanctuary protected by rays of God's glory? I think it depends on whether we are celebrating the festival in the Diaspora or in the Land of Israel.

[Sukkot For Our Time \(from Koren Sacks Sukkot mahzor\) by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks](http://rabbisacks.org/sukkot-time-extract-koren-sacks-sukkot-mahzor/)
<http://rabbisacks.org/sukkot-time-extract-koren-sacks-sukkot-mahzor/>

Of all the festivals, Succot is surely the one that speaks most powerfully to our time. Kohelet could almost have been written in the twenty-first century. Here is the picture of ultimate success, the man who has it all – the houses, the cars, the clothes, the adoring women, the envy of others – he has pursued everything this world can offer from pleasure to possessions to power to wisdom and yet, surveying the totality of his life, he can only say, in effect, "Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless." Kohelet's failure to find meaning is directly related to his obsession with the "I" and the "Me": "I built for myself. I gathered for myself. I acquired for myself." The more he pursues his desires, the emptier his life becomes. There is no more powerful critique of the consumer society, whose idol is the self, whose icon is the "selfie" and whose moral code is "Whatever works for you." This is the society that achieved unprecedented affluence, giving people more choices than they have ever known, and yet at same time saw an unprecedented rise in alcohol and drug abuse, eating disorders, stress-related syndromes, depression, attempted suicide and actual suicide. A society of tourists, not pilgrims, is not one that will yield the sense of a life worth living. Of all things people have chosen to worship, the self is the least fulfilling. A culture of narcissism quickly gives way to loneliness and despair.

Kohelet was also, of course, a cosmopolitan: a man at home everywhere and therefore nowhere. This is the man who had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines but in the end could only say, "More bitter than death is the woman." It should be clear to anyone who reads this in the context of the life of King Solomon, the author of the book, that Kohelet is not really talking about women but about himself.

In the end Kohelet finds meaning in simple things. "Sweet is the sleep of a labouring man." "Enjoy life with the woman you love." "Eat, drink and enjoy the sun." That,

ultimately, is the meaning of Succot as a whole. It is a festival of simple things. It is, Jewishly, the time we come closer to nature than any other, sitting in a hut with only leaves for a roof, and taking in our hands the unprocessed fruits and foliage of the palm branch, the citron, twigs of myrtle and leaves of willow. It is a time when we briefly liberate ourselves from the sophisticated pleasures of the city and the processed artefacts of a technological age, where we take time to recapture some of the innocence we had when we were young, when the world still had the radiance of wonder. The power of Succot is that it takes us back to the most elemental roots of our being. You don't need to live in a palace to be surrounded by clouds of glory. You don't need to be gloriously wealthy to buy yourself the same leaves and fruit that a billionaire uses in worshipping God. Living in the succah and inviting guests to your meal, you discover that the people who have come to visit you are none other than Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their wives (such is the premise of Ushpizin, the mystical guests). What makes a hut more beautiful than a home is that when it comes to Succot there is no difference between the richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor. We are all strangers on earth, temporary residents in God's almost eternal universe. And whether or not we are capable of pleasure, whether or not we have found happiness, nonetheless we can all feel joy. Succot is the time we ask the most profound question of what makes a life worth living. Having prayed on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to be written in the Book of Life, Kohelet forces us to remember how brief life actually is, and how vulnerable. "Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." What matters is not how long we live, but how intensely we feel that life is a gift we repay by giving to others. Joy, the overwhelming theme of the festival, is what we feel when we know that it is a privilege simply to be alive, inhaling the intoxicating beauty of this moment amidst the profusion of nature, the teeming diversity of life and the sense of communion with those many others who share our history and our hope.

Most majestically of all, Succot is the festival of insecurity. It is the candid acknowledgment that there is no life without risk, yet we can face the future without fear when we know we are not alone. God is with us, in the rain that brings blessings to the earth, in the love that brought the universe and us into being, and in the resilience of spirit that allowed a small and vulnerable people to outlive the greatest empires the world has ever known. Succot reminds us that God's glory was present in the small, portable Tabernacle Moses and the Israelites built in the desert even more emphatically than in Solomon's Temple with all its grandeur. A Temple can be destroyed. But a succah, even if broken, can be rebuilt tomorrow. Security is not something we can achieve physically but it is something we can acquire mentally, psychologically, spiritually. All it needs is the courage and willingness to sit under the shadow of God's sheltering wings

["I Believe" by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks](#)

<http://rabbisacks.org/i-believe-an-introduction-to-covenant-conversation-5780/>

Note: This is an introduction to the commentary that Rabbi Sacks will be writing for the coming year 5780. Rabbi Sacks refers to his commentary as Covenant and Conversation

When I was Chief Rabbi, I had wonderful friendships with other religious leaders, not least the two Archbishops of Canterbury during my time. This was part of a profound healing that has taken place between Jews and Christians in the post-Holocaust era, after many centuries of estrangement and worse. We respected our differences, but we worked together on the things that mattered to both of us, from climate change to the alleviation of poverty.

On one occasion the then Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, made a curious request. "We are embarking on a year of Reading the Bible. Do you think you might do something similar within the Jewish community?" "Of course," I replied. "We do it every year. There's only one word we might find problematic." "Which word is that?" he asked.

“The word ‘reading,’” I said. “We never simply read the Bible. We study it, interpret it, interpret other interpretations, argue, question, debate. The verb ‘reading’ does not quite do justice to the way we interact with the Torah. It is usually more active than that.” I might have added that even the phrase *keriat ha-Torah*, which is usually taken to mean, reading the Torah, probably does not mean that at all. *Keriat ha-Torah*, properly understood, is a performative act. It is a weekly recreation of the revelation at Mount Sinai. It is a covenant ratification ceremony like the one Moshe performed at Sinai: “Then he took the book of the covenant and read it aloud to the people, and they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will faithfully do!” (Ex. 24: 7), and like the covenant renewal ceremony celebrated by Ezra after the return from Babylon, as described in Nehemiah 8-9. *Keriah* in this sense does not mean reading in the modern sense of sitting in an armchair with a book. It means declaring, proclaiming, establishing and making known the law. It is like what happens in the British Parliament when the bill gets its final ‘reading,’ that is, its ratification.

So the Torah isn’t something we merely read. It involves total engagement. And what has made that engagement possible is the rabbinic concept of Midrash. Midrash as I understand it (there are, of course, other ways) was the rabbinic response to the end of prophecy. So long as there were prophets – until the time of Haggai, Zecharia and Malachi – they brought the word of God to their generation. They heard it; they declared it; the Divine word lived within the currents and tides of history.

But there came a time when there were no more prophets. How then could Jews bridge the gap between the word then, and the historical situation now? It was an immense crisis, and different groups of Jews responded in different ways. The Sadducees, as far as we can tell, confined themselves to the literal text. For them Torah did not renew itself generation after generation. It had been given once and that was enough.

Other groups, including those we know from the Dead Sea Scrolls, developed a kind of biblical exegesis known as *Pesher*. There is a surface meaning of the text but there is also a hidden meaning, that often has to do with events or people in the present, or the end of days, that were assumed to be coming soon.

The rabbis, however, developed the technique of midrash which by close reading could give us insight into specifics of Jewish law (*midrash halakhah*) or details of biblical narrative that are missing from the text (*midrash Aggadah*). So powerful was this form of engagement that the single greatest institution of rabbinic Judaism is named after it: the *Bet Midrash*, the ‘house’ or ‘home’ of midrash.

Essentially, midrash is the bridge across the abyss of time between the world of the original text, thirty to forty centuries ago, and our world in the present of time and place. Midrash asks not “What did the text mean then?” but rather, “What does the text mean to me-here-now?” Behind midrash are three fundamental principles of faith.

First, the Torah is God’s word, and just as God transcends time so does His word. It would be absurd, for instance, to suppose some human being more than three thousand years ago could have foreseen smart phones, social media and being online, on-call, 24/7. Yet Shabbat speaks precisely to that phenomenon and to our need for a digital detox once a week. God speaks to us today in the unsuspected inflections of words he spoke thirty-three centuries ago.

Second, the covenant between God and our ancestors at Mount Sinai still holds today. It has survived the Babylonian exile, the Roman destruction, centuries of dispersion, and the Holocaust. The Torah is the text of that covenant, and it binds us still.

Third, the principles underlying the Torah have changed very little in the intervening centuries. To be sure, we no longer have a Temple or sacrifices. We no longer practice capital punishment. But the values that underlie the Torah are strikingly relevant to contemporary society and to our individual lives in the 21st-century secular time. So, we don’t merely read the Torah. We bring to it our time, our lives, our most attentive listening, and our deepest existential commitments. My own beliefs have been formed in

that ongoing conversation with the biblical text that is part of the Jewish mind and the Jewish week. Which is why, to emphasise this personal engagement, I've decided to call this year's series of Covenant & Conversation, 'I Believe,' as a way of saying, this is how I have come to see the world, having listened as attentively as I can to the Torah and its message for me-here-now.

The Torah is not a systematic treatise about beliefs but it is a unique way of seeing the world and responding to it. And in an age of moral darkness, its message still shines. So, at any rate, I believe. May it be a year of learning and growing for us all. (*Since 2011 Rabbi Barenblat has served as spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Israel, a congregation in western Massachusetts.*)



Three More Holidays at the Very End of Sukkot by Rabbi Rachel Barenblat

<https://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/simchat-torah/>

Hoshana Rabbah -- "The Great 'Save-Us!'" -- is the seventh day of Sukkot and a minor holiday in its own right. On this day, traditionally, we make seven circuits of our sanctuaries with our lulavim and our Torah scrolls while reciting prayers called Hoshanot which ask God to bring healing and salvation. Seven is a number with spiritual significance in Judaism: seven days of the week, the seven "lower" (accessible) sefirot (aspects of God), the seven ancestral figures (some invite seven men and seven women) welcomed into the Sukkah as ushpizin (holy guests) -- and now on the seventh day of this festival we circumnambulate our sanctuaries seven times, singing and praying. There's also a very old custom of taking the willow branches from our lulavim and beating them against the ground; the falling willow leaves are an embodied prayer for rain. (For more on that: *The Ritual of Beating the Willow.*)

Even if you're not dancing or processing around a sanctuary with branches and Torah scrolls, reading some hoshanot and reflecting on their meaning is a lovely observance of Hoshana Rabbah. I like the ones written by my teacher Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, which online here at the Reb Zalman Legacy Project blog, and also here at the Shalom Center (with commentary from Rabbi Arthur Waskow below the hoshanot themselves.) And here's a brief excerpt from a translated hoshana, provided by Rabbi David Seidenberg of NeoHasid.org.

Shemini Atzeret -- "The Pausing of the Eighth Day" -- is the eighth day of Sukkot. Yes, Sukkot is a seven-day holiday, but tradition tells us that on the eighth day, God (Who has been so enjoying spending time with us in our sukkot) says "awww, do you really have to go? Can't you linger a little longer?" So we stay in our sukkot for one more day, one more chance to engage in intimate connection with Shekhinah, the immanent and indwelling Presence of God. This is a day for spaciousness, a day of pausing, a day to celebrate the white space which cradles and contains all of the texts and teachings and observances of the holiday season now ending. The Days of Awe and Sukkot are a dense and busy time, full of obligations and sermons and teachings; Shemini Atzeret is a chance to pause, to take a breath, to receive the blessings of stillness.

This day is a hinge-point in our liturgical year between the summer season and the winter season. On Shemini Atzeret, we recite special prayers for rain, and we enter into the liturgical winter-season when our Amidah contains a one-line prayer for rain every day instead of the summertime one-line prayer for dew. I've written a contemporary prayer for rain which can be read / davened on this day, which you can find in the VR archives here; you might also enjoy my Sestina for Shemini Atzeret, which I wrote last year and which I still really like. Shemini Atzeret is the 22nd of Tishrei, which begins tonight at sundown and lasts through tomorrow (Monday).

Simchat Torah -- "Rejoicing in the Torah" -- is the culmination of all of our celebrations during this holy season. We read the very end of the Torah scroll, then read the beginning

again, celebrating the neverending nature of our collective story. We dance around the room with Torah scrolls singing songs. Here's the poem I wrote some years ago for this festival, Mobius, which is also available in 70 faces, my collection of Torah poems (Phoenicia, 2011.)

So when is Simchat Torah? Well, it depends on who you ask. In Israel, Sukkot lasts for seven days; the seventh day is Hoshana Rabbah; and the 8th day is both Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. Reform communities outside of the land of Israel also operate on this calendar. (I'm not sure about Reconstructionist communities; Jewish Renewal communities' practices vary.) In Diaspora, Orthodox and Conservative Jews move from 7 days of Sukkot (the final one being Hoshana Rabbah) to two days of Shemini Atzeret, the second of which is Simchat Torah, making the whole shebang a 9-day observance instead of an 8-day one. (In my local community we'll celebrate Simchat Torah on Monday night, in conjunction with the local college Jewish student group.) It's possible to experience a kind of holiday fatigue at this moment in the year. Tisha b'Av, then the month of Elul, then Rosh Hashanah, the Ten Days of Teshuvah, Yom Kippur, a week of Sukkot...! But there's beauty and meaning in each of these three final days of this holiday season. I offer this blessing: may each of us find a point of access into the beauty and wisdom of Hoshana Rabbah, Shemini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah. May we connect with the gift of being able to ask for help in healing our world, the gift of holy pausing and sacred rest, and the gift of Torah, the story which never ends.

Shemini Atzeret in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/768640/jewish/Torah-Reading-in-a-Nutshell.htm

A tenth of all produce is to be eaten in Jerusalem, or else exchanged for money with which food is purchased and eaten there. On certain years this tithe is given to the poor instead. Firstborn cattle and sheep are to be offered in the Temple and their meat eaten by the Kohen (priest).

The mitzvah of charity obligates a Jew to aid a needy fellow with a gift or loan. On the Sabbatical year (occurring every seventh year) all loans are to be forgiven. All indentured servants are to be set free after six years of service.

The portion then mentions the laws of the three pilgrimage festivals — Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot — when all should go to "see and be seen" before G-d in the Holy Temple.

G-d declares that the eighth day will be the festival of Shemini Atzeret, one bullock is offered, together with a ram and seven lambs. With each of the animals is brought the prescribed meal, wine and oil supplements: three tenths of an ephah of fine flour, and half a hin each of wine and oil, per bullock; two tenths of flour and a third of a hin of each of the liquids for each ram; and one tenth and one quarter respectively for each lamb.

Shemini Atzeret Haftarah in a Nutshell: I Kings 8:54-66.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/768642/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The setting for the haftarah for the holiday of Shemini Atzeret is the dedication of the first Holy Temple by King Solomon. The dedication was a seven-day festive affair, which was immediately followed by the seven festive days of the holiday of Sukkot. And then, as we read in this haftarah, on the "eighth day" (i.e., Shemini Atzeret), Solomon sent the people off to their homes.

The reading opens immediately after King Solomon concludes a lengthy public prayer to G-d. He then blesses the assembled Jewish people and encourages them to follow G-d's will and observe the commandments—it is this blessing that occupies the bulk of the reading.

The King then inaugurates the Holy Temple by bringing various offerings: peace offerings, burnt offerings, and meal and fat offerings. And then, "on the eighth day he dismissed the people, and they blessed the King and went to their homes, rejoicing and

delighted of heart for all the goodness that G-d had wrought for David His servant and for Israel His people."

Simchat Torah: V'zot Haberacha in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3152/jewish/Parshah-in-a-Nutshell-VZot-HaBerachah.htm

The Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret Torah readings are from Leviticus 22-23, Numbers 29, and Deuteronomy 14-16. These readings detail the laws of the moadim or "appointed times" on the Jewish calendar for festive celebration of our bond with G-d; including the mitzvot of dwelling in the sukkah (branch-covered hut) and taking the "Four Kinds" on the festival of Sukkot; the offerings brought in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem on Sukkot, and the obligation to journey to the Holy Temple to "to see and be seen before the face of G-d" on the three annual pilgrimage festivals — Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot. On Simchat Torah ("Rejoicing of the Torah") we conclude, and begin anew, the annual Torah-reading cycle. First we read the Torah section of Vezot Haberachah, which recounts the blessings that Moses gave to each of the twelve tribes of Israel before his death. Echoing Jacob's blessings to his twelve sons five generations earlier, Moses assigns and empowers each tribe with its individual role within the community of Israel. Vezot Haberachah then relates how Moses ascended Mount Nebo from whose summit he saw the Promised Land. "And Moses the servant of G-d died there in the Land of Moab by the mouth of G-d... and no man knows his burial place to this day." The Torah concludes by attesting that "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom G-d knew face to face... and in all the mighty hand and the great awesome things which Moses did before the eyes of all Israel."

Immediately after concluding the Torah, we begin it anew by reading the first chapter of Genesis (the beginning of next Shabbat's Torah reading) describing G-d's creation of the world in six days and His ceasing work on the seventh—which He sanctified and blessed as a day of rest.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Joshua 1:1-18

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/572744/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's Haftarah describes Joshua's succession of his master Moses, whose passing is discussed in the Torah reading.

G-d reveals Himself to Joshua, and appoints him as Moses' successor. G-d encouraged Joshua to lead the Israelites in to the Holy Land. "Every place on which the soles of your feet will tread I have given to you, as I have spoken to Moses. From this desert and Lebanon to the great river, the Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the great sea westward shall be your boundary." G-d assures Joshua that He will be with him just as He was with Moses and encourages him to be strong and brave, to study the Torah constantly and keep it close, so that he may succeed in all his endeavors.

Joshua orders his officers to prepare the Jewish people to cross the Jordan River. He then tells the members of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh, who had chosen to settle on the eastern bank of the Jordan, to go and assist their brethren in the conquest of the Canaanite mainland, after which they would return to their plot of land. The Jewish people pledge their allegiance to Joshua: "Just as we obeyed Moses in everything, so shall we obey you. Only that the L-rd your G-d be with you as He was with Moses."

Two Stories of Time: Simchat Torah 5780 by Rabbi Adam Greenwald

<https://www.aju.edu/ziegler-school-rabbinic-studies/our-torah/back-issues/two-stories-time>

There are two, fundamental stories that one can tell about the nature of time:

In the first, most common in the ancient world, time is envisioned as a vast, unbroken circle. The moon grows and shrinks with each passing month, and then does it again. The seasons progress on in an endless loop. Babies are born, old people pass away, and the babies themselves someday have babies and then grew old. What was once will inevitably be again. There is nothing new under the sun.

The second story is the one primarily told by moderns: Time is a line, a sequence of events that make up a journey from one stage to the next. Woven into the concept of linear time is the notion of progress. If time is a circle then there is no possibility of progress, because every step that one takes along a circumference leads you closer to where you started. However, if time is a line – then history is the unfolding journey toward the present, and the present is perpetually giving way to the future. Put another way: The iPhone 11 follows the iPhone 10, and never the other way around. Optimists may side with Paul McCartney, who sang that “it’s getting better all the time.” Cynics may believe the opposite; that each generation (and each iPhone) grows steadily worse. But, both agree that time flows onward toward a world that is markedly different than the one that preceded it.

Simchat Torah, the celebration of the completion of the annual Torah reading cycle and its immediate restarting, captures elements from both stories. On one hand, Simchat Torah is all about circles. As soon as we complete the final reading from Deuteronomy, we roll the cylindrical scrolls back to the Beginning and start all over again. In celebration of this ritual, we dance seven hakafot, seven sacred circlings, in which we symbolize with our bodies the eternal process of reading and re-reading that has defined Jewish life for millennia. As the Talmud instructs, *hafoch ba v’hafoch ba kula ba*– we spend our Jewish lives turning the Torah over and over again, since everything is in it.

However, the Torah that we celebrate on this day radically rejects the notion that time is a never-ending loop. It begins with the story of Creation – the affirmation that time has a definite beginning, endowed from the outset with a sense of purpose. Abraham sets out on a quest, leaving his past behind to forge a new faith. And, God’s greatest gift to the Jewish People is our liberation from slavery, leading to our exodus across a wilderness toward a new possibility. The narrative of the Torah disrupts the idea that what was once will always be, and instead tells our story as one of an ongoing journey from here to there, from darkness to light.

Simchat Torah invites us not to choose one story of time or the other, but to recognize the truth in both. There is great comfort and meaning in returning to the same stories year after year. Yet, if we are listening to their message, we know that it is not sufficient to simply stay the same, like our ancestors we need to break out of old patterns in search for new truths; that we and our world ought to always be on a journey toward greater freedom. The readings stay the same, but we are meant to change, to strive, to grow. On Simchat Torah we affirm the truth of the circle and of the line, and rejoice in the coming together of both. *(Rabbi Adam Greenwald is the Director of the Miller Introduction to Judaism Program at American Jewish University)*

[Celebrating Layers of Meaning on Simchat Torah by Rabbi Linda Joseph](https://reformjudaism.org/blog/2018/09/26/celebrating-layers-meaning-simchat-torah)

<https://reformjudaism.org/blog/2018/09/26/celebrating-layers-meaning-simchat-torah>

On Simchat Torah, I watch as the Torah scroll is carefully unfurled by congregants onto a series of long connected tables. The columns are exposed one-upon-one, revealing the patterns between the two wooden poles known as the “trees of life.” The markings dance before my eyes as letters made of blackened oak gall-nut ink contrast with the talc-rubbed white animal skin. The calligrapher in me delights in those handwritten pages. The Jew in me loves that they are so much more than designs scattered on parchment sheets sewn together with animal sinew.

I am reminded of the teaching of the 18th-century Chasidic teacher Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl who opens his commentary on the Torah portion Chukat with these words:

It is understood that the Torah is letters, vowels, cantillation and crowns. This is how the Torah was revealed, to make it possible for every human to understand, so each person could achieve according to their own capabilities and attain enlightenment. (Me’or Einayim, Chukat)

Menachem Nachum teaches that the pages of our Torah text are layered with interpretation. The written letters the scribe writes in the Torah are one level of transmission, the vowel sounds and the cantillation marks added by the Masoretes (6th- to 10th-century scribes and scholars who help create the text of the Bible) to interpret the sound and melody of Torah aloud add insight to the text, and the crowns the scribes use to adorn some letters of the alphabet in the scroll beg their own nuances. Each mark is a gloss on God's word, adding meaning, creativity, inspiration, and awe, taking us deeper and deeper into the depth of Torah.

This layering of meaning is acted out by some congregations as they parade with all their Torah scrolls on Simchat Torah in a series of circles known as hakafot (going around). Before each of seven circular processions, an acrostic prayer in the order of the Hebrew alphabet is intoned. Uttering the order of the letters suggests something magical is about to be revealed through letters, a forewarning of the depth of the upcoming reading of God-inspired markings. With each of the reading-revelations of the alphabet poem, a joyous circular dance erupts.

The circular parades augment the symbolism too. Circles in many cultures are a symbol of wholeness. So, too, in Judaism. In this magical drama of Simchat Torah, celebrating God's revealed letters, the congregation and its circular parades physically mimic the story cycle of Torah readings. The congregation parades seven times for the number seven is an indication of wholeness – a complete rotation.

Then, finally, to add to the mystery of the Simchat Torah moment, the congregation adds an eighth circle. Eight is the number that indicates beyond the complete. That eighth cycle is the reading of Torah itself as the community chants the last words of Deuteronomy immediately followed by the first words of Genesis. In that eighth circle, beyond totality, is our hint that an understanding of Torah is outside what we can comprehend. The Torah comes from the One Without End, the One with whom we yearn to comprehend and connect. Torah originates and continuously flows from God's abundance.

All the Torah that we read and understand is a hint of God beyond. In Pirkei Avot, Rabbi Ben Bag says referring to Torah: "Turn it and turn it, within it is everything. Reflect on it and grow old with it. Don't discard it, for nothing is better than it." With these words he explains that Torah is a lifetime endeavor that will continue to reveal insight. "...within it is everything" – within it is the Holy One. Menachem Mendel teaches that a layered meaning is found in each stroke, pronunciation, melodic interpretation, and decoration, unfurling its own revelation of text. Our hakafot seven, and our reading eight, indicate for us a depth beyond depths to which all of this transcends.

Simchat Torah in my congregation is the rolling out of the Torah onto a long table. It is music, flags, parades, a Torah review as some b'nei mitzvah revisit phrases of their Torah readings, and the Torah chanting of the end of Deuteronomy and the beginning of Genesis under a raised chuppah (wedding canopy). Whatever your synagogue's customs for celebration, Simchat Torah is so much more than these tangible actions. Simchat Torah is a joyful celebration of the never-ending story that leads us to the Holy One that transcends our being and understanding. So, we will re-commence the cycle of reading on Simchat Torah, hoping that our interaction with the text this year will add a tad to our comprehension of that which can never be completed, because it is more than a whole, and strengthen our connection to God. (*Rabbi Linda Joseph leads Har Sinai Congregation in Owings MD.*)

Yahrzeits

Perry Fine remembers his father Melvin Fine (Melech ben Avraham v'Ettel) on Sun. Oct. 20. (Tishrei 21).

Mel Zwillenberg remembers Susan Zwillenberg's mother Trudy Altman (Grunah) Thur. Oct. 24 (Tishrei 25).

