

Sukkot



Sukkot, a Hebrew word meaning "booths" or "huts," refers to the Jewish festival of giving thanks for the fall harvest. It also commemorates the 40 years of Jewish wandering in the desert after receiving the Torah atop Mt. Sinai. Sukkot, which is a seven day holiday, begins 5 days after Yom Kippur. The holiday of Sukkot, also called *Z'man Simchateinu* (Season of Our Rejoicing), is the only festival associated with an explicit commandment to rejoice. Our modern Thanksgiving holiday is patterned after Sukkot.

Sukkot is marked by several traditions. One tradition is to erect a sukkah, a small, temporary booth or hut, symbolizes the frail dwellings in which the Israelites lived during their years of wandering in the desert after the Exodus from Egypt. It also serves to remind Jews of the biblical account of how God protected them, provided for their needs in the wilderness, and by implication still watches over us today. A sukkah has to have at least three walls. Only one can be an existing wall, like the side of a house. The walls are usually constructed from canvas, wood or metal. The roof to be temporary, covered with loose branches from trees or anything that grew out of the ground. According to tradition, this roof covering, *s'chach*, should give shade, yet allow those in the sukkah to see the stars through the roof at night. Once the sukkah is built, it is common to decorate it by hanging fruit and other items from the roof, putting pictures or posters on the walls, and even laying carpet on the floor. It is a place to extend hospitality to friends and family and is commonly used for eating, entertaining and even for sleeping.



is



At MRT it is a tradition for the Men's Club to erect our sukkah on the Sunday morning prior to the start of the holiday. Congregants come together, sharing tools, laughter, coffee, and doughnuts while performing this mitzvah. Our Religious School students take great pride in decorating the sukkah every year and look forward to having a pizza party or an ice cream treat and saying the appropriate blessings in the sukkah. A service is conducted every evening in the sukkah and congregants are encouraged to come and eat their dinner there with their temple family.



Lulav and Etrog



The celebration of the fall harvest is also expressed by blessing and waving the lulav and the etrog, symbols of the harvest. The lulav is a combination of date palm, willow and myrtle branches, held together by a woven palm branch. The etrog, or citron, is a lemon-like fruit with a wonderful citrus smell. Rabbis have compared the tapered oval shape of the etrog to a heart, thus justifying its standing as the heart of the festival's prayer. The palm symbolizes the spine: the strength of our body that allows us to do amazing things; The willow represents our lips, that we should always be mindful of what we say; the myrtle are our eyes that we should pay attention to everything around us just as the lulav shakes in every direction;

When reciting the blessing over the lulav and etrog, one should wave them in six directions—north, south, east, west, up, and down. This action symbolizes that God can be found in all directions, not only in one particular place.