

# 5 ways to celebrate Sukkot

## Jewish traditions and Christian life

During the seven days of Sukkot, Jewish households leave their solid dwellings and spend time in porous, fragile huts; a physical reminder of their vulnerability and dependence on God for gifts of shelter, food, warmth and protection. How might Sukkot inspire our own Christian reflections on God's sheltering presence?



**Eat outdoors.** If you have a backyard, verandah, balcony, or a nice shady tree, take some of your meals outdoors during the days of Sukkot. Sip wine under the stars, coffee under a morning sky.



**Read Exodus.** Open your bible to the pages of Exodus (and/or the Book of Numbers) and read what life was like for the Israelites—our ancestors in faith—as they wandered forty years in the desert.



**Tell stories.** Does your family have a story of exile or wandering? A family member who was an immigrant, a refugee, or simply a backpacker roughing it in a desolate part of the world. Tell the tale.



**Give thanks.** Thank God for the gift of shelter, food, family, and for the comforts of your home. During Sukkot take a practical step to help your city's homeless. Or offer hospitality to someone in need.



**Be happy.** How caught up we can become in our worries and duties. During this festival, trust God enough to smile, laugh, enjoy your blessings and have some wholesome fun amidst God's creation!



## Light of Torah

Ancient texts  
through fresh eyes,  
alive for today.

## Why reflect on Torah?

*We must remind ourselves how the permanence of Israel is accompanied by a continuous spiritual fecundity, in the rabbinical period, in the Middle Ages, and in modern times, taking its start from a patrimony which we long shared, so much so that "the faith and religious life of the Jewish people, as they are professed and practiced still today, can greatly help us to understand better certain aspects of the life of the Church" (John Paul II, March 6, 1982).*

(Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Notes*, 1985.)

Each week this **Light of Torah** series invites Catholics to reflect on the Hebrew Scriptures following the Jewish liturgical calendar, drawing on Jewish sources and insights. In doing so we not only come to taste the spiritual wealth of Judaism, we also come to know better our own Christian faith.

This week, Jews are celebrating the beautiful festival of Sukkot. We depart slightly from our usual Torah-reading format to focus on the meaning of this festival and what it can teach us about living trustingly under the shelter of divine providence.

Today's issue concludes a whole year of Torah reflection. If you have travelled with us through the year, through all five books of the Torah, well done! May you enjoy Sukkot in a special way.

And next week? The Torah cycle starts all over again! Genesis 1:1: *In the beginning...*

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The *Light of Torah* leaflet series for Catholic parishes encourages parishioners to be attentive to the gift of Torah as part of their sacred Scriptures, and to the gift of Judaism which gave us Jesus, the Living Torah. Text by Teresa Pirola. Illustrations by Francine Pirola. © The Story Source, 2010. Reproduction permitted for non-commercial church use. Further reading: [www.lightoftorah.net](http://www.lightoftorah.net); [www.batkol.info](http://www.batkol.info) and [www.etz-hayim.com](http://www.etz-hayim.com).





## Sukkot Festival of Booths (or 'Tabernacles')

From the Days of Repentance and the solemn tones of Yom Kippur, the Jewish calendar moves quickly into a seven day festival of joy and celebration: Sukkot.

The term 'sukkot' is the plural form of the Hebrew word *sukah* which means 'tent, booth, temporary dwelling.' If you love camping, cubby houses or al fresco dining, you will love this festival!

(1) Strassfeld, p.147.

Sources: Steinberg, *Celebrating the Jewish Year* (Philadelphia, 2007); Strassfeld, *The Jewish Holidays* (NY, 1985). Scripture: *NRSV*.

## Temple times

*"You shall observe the festival of ingathering, at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor"* (Ex. 23:16).

Sukkot appears in the book of Exodus as an agricultural feast linked to the harvest. Whether it be the final gathering of produce before the onset of winter, or the completion of the Days of Awe, this is a festival imbued with a sense of security, satisfaction and joy.

Sukkot is one of the pilgrimage festivals; i.e., in ancient times pilgrims from all over Israel would make their way up to the holy city of Jerusalem for the elaborate Temple rituals.

## Today

*"You shall live in booths for seven days; all that are citizens in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God"* (Lev. 23:42,43)

As well as its agricultural theme, Sukkot recalls the story of the Israelites' desert wanderings. As part of Sukkot festivities today, many Jewish households build a *sukkah* (a hut or temporary dwelling with four walls and a roof of branches). During Sukkot, members of the household eat their meals in the *sukkah*, and some sleep there as well. In this way they recall the nomadic lifestyle of their ancient ancestors and the constant care God showed the Israelites as they made their way to the promised land.

## Torah

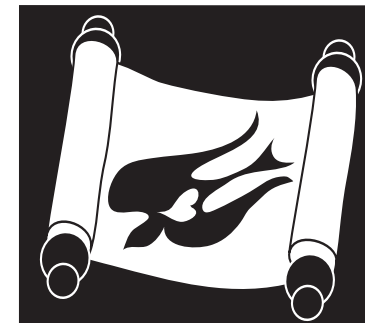
The Torah gives three main commandments relating to Sukkot: the Israelites are to [1] live in the *sukkah*, [2] gather together the four species (i.e., four kinds of plants mentioned in Lev. 23:40), [3] spend the festival rejoicing. All three continue to find expression in contemporary Sukkot customs, along with the recitation of prayers, synagogue services, reading the Book of Ecclesiastes, and inviting symbolic guests (e.g., Abraham, Moses, and other biblical wanderers/exiles) into the *sukkah*.

Above all, Sukkot is an attitude and practice of faith. By surrendering bricks and mortar for a *sukkah*, one's physical space symbolizes a reaching for the security of God's hand. As one Jewish writer puts it, "Sukkot is a reminder not to become entombed in our homes, a reminder of a different kind of shelter made of openness and faith. It is a reminder of the long time ago when we followed the Lord into the desert, and painfully learned the meaning of trust."(1)

Hospitality and giving shelter to the homeless are also important to the practices of Sukkot.

## Taking it to heart

- Have you ever been inside a *sukkah*?
- Share a time when you felt vulnerable and highly dependent on God's care. In what way did this event/time shape your life?
- As Catholics, how do we teach our children the important lessons and values expressed by the Jewish festival of Sukkot?



## Faith & Life

*A parishioner shares:*

Last summer my husband and I took our family on a beach holiday. We felt close to nature and freed from phone, email and work demands. In our relaxed state we spent most of our time in swimmers and shorts.

It was during this 'time out' that I began thinking about how cluttered my life is back home. Travelling with children, I had packed so many 'just in case' items which we didn't need. The distasteful thought occurred that when I got home I would have to unpack it all again! How much hassle I create for myself by cramming my lifestyle with clothes and other things! Our society is so consumer-driven that we think of our luxury items as 'essentials.' I began to think about how little we need to get by.

## Sukkah-chat:

How might Moses and his desert-wandering companions enter this conversation?