

## **Sukkot is a joyous celebration of Hashem's love for us, past and present.**

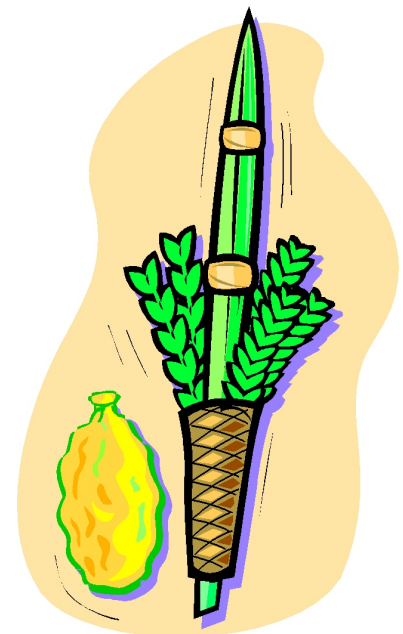
The Sukkot holiday reminds us of a story of long ago; when the Jewish people were freed from the slavery in Egypt at the hands of King Pharaoh, they traveled into the desert to receive the Torah, en-route to the land of Israel. The desert is a hostile environment, and under natural circumstances, a large nation of people would not be able to survive the harsh elements of the desert (the intense heat by day, the cold at night, the lack of food, water and growing things, the wild creatures, etc.) for such an

extended period of time. Hashem loved us then and now, and did not want the Jewish nation to suffer in the desert; He provided us with a protection, referred to as the "Seven Clouds of Glory" that protected us on all six sides, with another acting as a lead to show the way.

By remembering the story of how Hashem protected us in the desert, we are reminded of his present love for us on a daily basis. We are joyous as we celebrate in the Sukkah - a 'hut' reminding us of the desert protection - during the Sukkot holiday. Just like the protection in the desert, the Sukkah is built in a temporary fashion, yet sturdy enough to withstand the wind for the seven days of the Sukkot holiday. The Sukkah roof uses cut greenery, called the "Schach." During the week of Sukkot, we 'live' in the Sukkah as we eat, socialize with friends, and celebrate together. Some even have the custom of sleeping in the Sukkah during this week. Sukkot is a joyous time, punctuated by lively community celebrations.

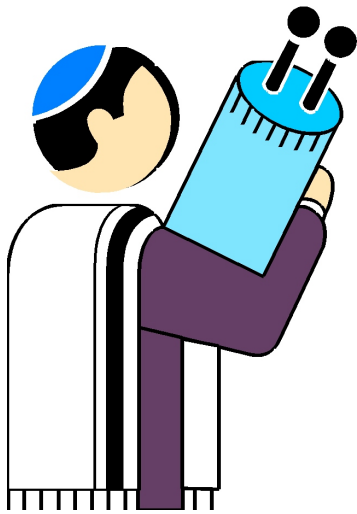
## **Sukkot is also a celebration of Jewish unity and integration.**

The Sukkah structure is one of the few Mitzvot that is "full-body." Rather than one part of the body (mind, hand, arm, mouth) being involved in the act, the full body is in the Sukkah structure to fulfill the Mitzvah. On Sukkot, we strive to integrate our inner selves with our outer selves as we use our entire body in the Mitzvah of Sukkah. We also integrate ourselves with our larger community, celebrating *together* in the Sukkah. One of the Mitzvot of this holiday, the Mitzvah of the Four Species, specifically signifieds this idea. During Sukkot, we gather four species



of growing things (a palm frond, a willow branch, a myrtle branch, and a citron fruit) that have distinct differences in taste and smell. The palm frond comes from a date tree, so it has "taste" but no "smell." The willow branch has neither "taste" nor "smell." The myrtle branch has a pleasant "smell" but no taste, and finally, the citron fruit has both a pleasant "smell" and a "taste." The "taste" signifies those of us who excel in Torah study, while "smell" signifies those of us who excel in acts of kindness to others. As a nation, we need all kinds of people. This Mitzvah demonstrates how each of us have different talents, and united, form a complete picture.

## **Simchat Torah is a Celebration of joy**



Simchat Torah is a celebration of joy as we complete one cycle of the weekly Torah portions, and begin reading it again from the beginning. The Torah is the source of our Judaic identity; by considering and learning the basis for our special holidays, customs, and Mitzvot, we can rejoice in our special Judaic lifestyle.

Therefore, as we complete the yearly cycle of learning the Torah portions, we celebrate in the Synagogue with the Torah. The Simchat Torah service is traditionally called "Hakafot" which literally means "circles" as young and old dance together in circles around the Bimah (the reading platform for the Torah in the synagogue), holding the Torah scrolls and decorative flags.