

# Reconstructionist Sukkot Across the Midwest

*A simultaneous celebration of a  
Midwest Reconstructionist Sukkot.*

October 6 and October 7, 2006/5766  
Ki Tisa, Exodus : 33:12-34:26

Service Supplement

# JRF Midwest Congregations

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Evanston, *Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation*

Naperville, *Congregation Beth Shalom*

Northbrook, *Shir Hadash Reconstructionist Synagogue*

Skokie, *Ezra-Habonim, The Nilas Township Jewish Congregation*

## **Indiana**

Indianapolis, *Congregation Beth El Zedeck*

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Detroit, *Reconstructionist Congregation of Detroit*

Lansing, *Congregation Kehillat Israel*

## **Minnesota**

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St. Louis, *Shir Hadash Reconstructionist Community*

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## **Wisconsin**

Madison, *Shaarei Shamayim*

Milwaukee, *Congregation Shir Hadash*

## **A message from your regional officers...**

May the blessings of Sukkot shelter you  
throughout the coming year!

L'Shana Tova

**Rich Klein, JRF Midwest Regional President**  
**Aura Ahuvia, JRF Midwest Regional Vice-President**  
**Sandy Weiss, JRF Midwest Regional Vice-President**



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Visit our regional web page at [www.jrf.org/midwest...](http://www.jrf.org/midwest...)  
updated the 1st of every month!

## YEARNING FOR HOME - THE SYMBOLISM OF THE SUKKAH AND THE FESTIVAL OF SUKKOT

Every generation experiences its own homesickness, a deep ache for somewhere to belong. In childhood the unfamiliar yields sweaty palms and anxious tears. As adults, even in known surroundings, a change in life produces an uneasy discomfort, a feeling of being somehow out of place. In a strange land, or even in our own, we seek a space that welcomes unconditionally, that embraces us warmly - we yearn for home.

Out of bondage the ancient Israelites emerge from Egypt, euphoric and homeless. The exhilaration of the sea crossing fades in the sun-bleached sands of the desert. For 40 years they move from place to place seeking home, erecting tents for shelter on the way. In remembrance of this journey, Jews are told to dwell in booths (sukkot) for seven days (Leviticus 23:42). These fragile structures represent the agricultural huts our ancestors erected during the harvest when they were at long last settled in the land of Israel, but they recall the makeshift tents in which the Israelites lived during their wilderness wanderings. The sukkah, often translated as tabernacle, reminds us also of the Jerusalem Temple, the great Divine Tabernacle, its Solomonic glory and its eventual destruction. Nature and history, the despair of exile and the promise of redemption, converge in Sukkot, the autumn holy days of thanksgiving. At the festival's heart is the experience of homelessness and the image of home - God's and our own.

The Talmud explains in precise detail the requirements for the building of the sukkah, the centerpiece of the festival. It is to be large enough for a person and a table, not higher than 20 cubits (about 10 yards) or lower than 10 handbreadths (about 40 inches). There must be at least two complete walls and a third partially constructed. The roof is to be made of "sekhakh", a covering of living vegetation, cut to shade the dwelling. The booth sits outdoors, its canopy, often decorated with harvest fruits, open to the sky. Jews are expected at the very least to eat a meal or momentarily to sit in the sukkah and to say a blessing. Its building is to begin immediately following the conclusion of Yom Kippur. There is no blessing recited for constructing the sukkah, for the commandment is to dwell in it. What matters most is how we live in the places we erect.

For the desert nomad, the sukkah is evidence of God's presence, reminiscent of the "clouds of glory" (Sukkah 11b) which accompanied and protected the people of Israel as they searched for home. For the Israelites settled in the land, the booth was the temporary shelter which reminded them of the fragility of home that required constant care. Both the experience of homelessness and home, of vulnerability and protection find a resting place in this modest structure.

In a time when we are less intimate with the land, this agricultural hut causes us to recall that nature, too, is our much grander home which generously lends us her earth on which to build. This bounteous gift of harvest greens, ripened fruits and evening starlight compels us to be grateful guardians and sacred stewards.

In the mystical tradition there arose a beautiful custom of inviting seven ancient guests into the sukkah. Special prayers were recited each of the seven nights of the festival to welcome Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and King David. These invisible historical guests were both symbols of God's emanations (sefirot - the divine presence as it becomes manifest in the world) and human hospitality.

The Zohar, the classic text of Jewish mysticism, finds God reaching back to those of our ancestors who made a home for us and in reaching out to those whom we are commanded to welcome home in our own time. As ancient guests of faith are welcomed, so must the poor be extended hospitality. "A man should not say, I will first satisfy myself with food and drink, and what is left I shall give to the poor, but the first of everything must be for the guests. And if he gladdens the guests and satisfies them, God rejoices with him..." - Zohar, V. 104a

In the autumn frost when the winds begin to blow and the rains turn cold, we go outdoors to live in booths. If this were simply a celebration of nature, one would expect it to be in the spring. Instead, it is in the fall when bushes aflame with bright oranges, reds and yellows are often drenched in the chill of a wet afternoon. It is not easy to dwell in sukkot. As we replay our ancestors' long thirsty desert walk, we are to think of ourselves as having wandered shelterless with them. This annual reenactment calls us to recognize our responsibility to those without a home.

Not the exhilaration of the Exodus, nor the glory of the Promised Land, this is the way in between vision and salvation. The sukkah is the symbol of the journey, of how we make our way in a world unredeemed, where nature is often beautiful but not always kind. We build a sukkah not to commemorate a miraculous walk through a sea split apart, but to mark the long tedious steps through the desert fraught with rebellion that almost tears a people apart. Sukkot is the story of homemaking of what it takes to build protection for our physical bodies and shelter for our souls. It is also a story of hope. With the prophet Zechariah whom we read on the festival, we envision a time when all peoples will come together and "God shall be One and God's name One." (Zechariah 14:9)

Fragile dwellings open to the world around us, the booths call us to remember that our greatest security is not walls but the welfare of others. Portable huts, symbols of God's presence they remind us that God is not fixed in space. We who cherish a specific place, discover a God who loves each particular place and not just one place in particular. Shabby shelters, the fall tabernacles give welcome shade but no absolute security from the storm. Sukkot teaches a faith tried in a desert crucible, a faith that even in the sandstorm finds hope and something over which to say a blessing. From impermanent booths exposed to the wind and rain, we learn of gratitude and generosity. We are taught that acts of physical nature may destroy a temporary home, but acts of human nature can build it again.

The sukkah finds its way into the daily and Shabbat evening liturgy in a prayer (Hashkivenu) which pleads for God's protection from the unknown, from enemies, hunger and pain. We ask that God spread over us a "sukkah of peace." In our lying down and our rising up again, it is the sukkah that remains the symbol for the journey, for the yearning to be safe, at home.

When the harvest and the moon are full, that yearning reaches its arms around the globe and envisions a time when all of earth's people will be fulfilled and have a place to call home.

*Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso*  
*Congregation Beth-El Zedeck, Indianapolis, IN*

## Holy Day - Holiday

For me, nothing illustrates more clearly the difference between the High Holy Day of Yom Kippur, a day marked by introspection and self-examination, and the holiday of Sukkot which celebrates an event in the life of the Jewish people, which is a time for individual and communal action. To someone my age, with grandchildren, it is the building of the sukkah that is the most meaningful part of the holiday.

Rabbi Michael Cohen's Dvar Torah is a beautiful elaboration of this theme. It can be found on the JRF website's Divrei Torah section.

*Arnie Berger  
Kol HaLev, Cleveland, OH*



## Feelings about Sukkot

Recently, I have been rereading the 613 mitzvot and teachings given to us as our commandments from Torah. I was struck by the beauty of the harvest teachings and about the responsibilities that we Jews have toward those who are poor or deprived, disabled or ill. This year on Sukkot, next to the etrog and lulav, I will place a sheath of wheat, a branch of fruit, fruit from the ground, loose grapes and forgotten clusters. I will tell my guests and family the story of each of these commandments, where they come from in the Torah, as a "gleaning" from our Holy Text's corners. I will ask my loved ones what each of these sources of physical and spiritual nutrition mean to us, as well as how we may enact these commandments now that most of us buy our fruit and grain from the grocery store. Some of our children have little knowledge of how grains of wheat can sustain a family. And I will hope for tzedakah and tikkun olam, justice and repair, to come from the four corners of my little college town sukkah.

*Marcy J. Epstein  
Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Havurah*

## Sukkot

Sukkot --  
time of gathering...  
bringing in the harvest --  
of our fields,  
of our lives.

Looking to the 4 corners  
of ourselves  
for the feeling of plenty.  
Looking to the 4 corners  
of our world  
for the feeling of  
hope.

Renewing our faith --  
in this earth,  
in humanity,  
in ourselves.

Praying with open minds  
and loving hearts  
for healing  
inside and out  
on this beautiful planet.

Sukkot -- harvest...  
gathering hope,  
gathering love,  
gathering peace.

*Ellen Pill  
Kneseth Israel Temple  
Wooster, Ohio*

## Sukkat Shalom by Noah Budin

Ufros aleinu sukkat Shlomecha (3X)  
Sukkat rachamim, v'chayim, v'shalom  
Sukkat shlomecha ufros aleinu

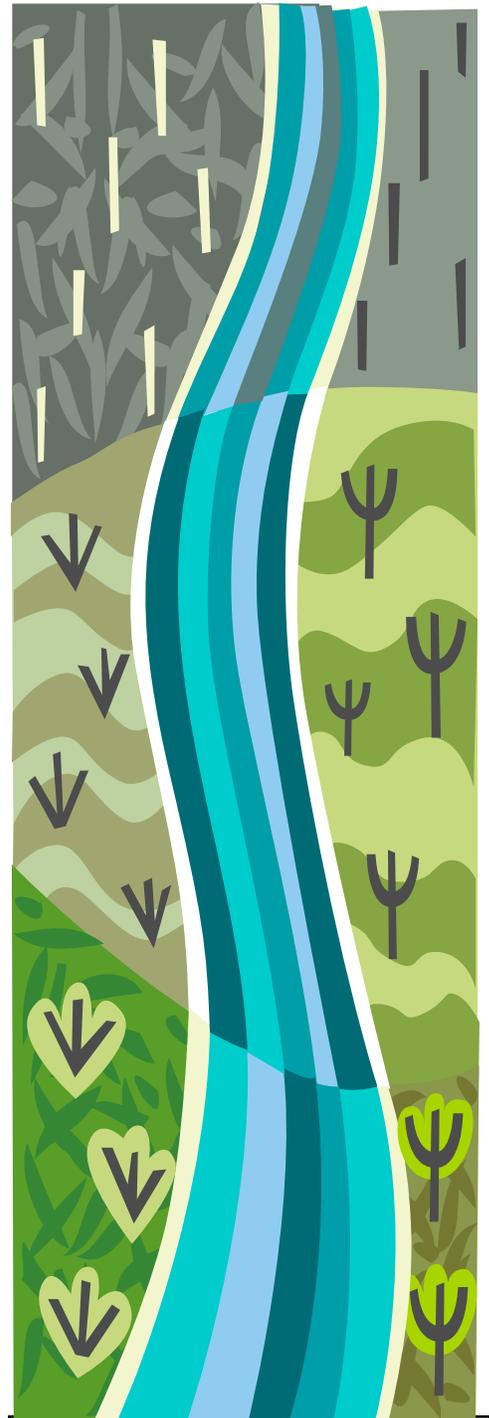
As we bless the holy harvest and reap the fruits of toil  
We will bathe our souls in moonlight and sleep upon the soil  
As we stand beneath the branches and the fragile web of vines  
We intone the ancient melodies not bound by place or time  
Bless the rain  
Glean the grain  
Feed the hungry  
Sukkat shlomecha ufros aleinu

As we enter through the doorposts  
Walls unsteady and unsure  
The ripened fruit reminds us that the garden was once pure  
As we reach out to the heavens  
We recite the Name  
For the multitudes who cry in hunger, loneliness and pain  
Bless the rain  
Glean the grain  
Feed the hungry  
Sukkat shlomecha ufros aleinu

Ufros aleinu sukkat Shlomecha (3X)  
Sukkat rachamim, v'chayim, v'shalom  
Sukkat shlomecha ufros aleinu  
Ufros aleinu

*Submitted by Beth Friedman Rommell  
Kol HaLev, Cleveland, Ohio*

(sheet music available by emailing [midwest@jrf.org](mailto:midwest@jrf.org))



**"So that future generations  
will know that I made the  
Israelites dwell in sukkot  
when I brought them out  
of the land of Egypt."**

**Leviticus 23:43**

## Sukkot

On our tables are the harvests of the earth,  
pears and grapes, corn and peppers;  
we thank You first for the food which sustains  
us in all seasons of the year.

In winter we stand at our windows looking out  
upon dreary trees;  
long ago the harvest was taken, only  
dry stalks remain,  
and frozen ground beneath the snow.

We thank You for shelter, for the body  
that shelters the spirit,  
for the house and the city and the nation which  
shelter us.

For the talents of those who design and build,  
for the ability of those who make  
shelters of justice and structure and peace.

In the spring, after rain, our eyes are filled  
with loveliness;  
greening lawn, opening bud, darting bird.

To thank You for fruitful earth and  
talented people is not enough;  
there is life and growth, perception,  
consciousness, logic and truth,  
and because of these there is  
Your gift of freedom.

We thank You that we are not like bud or bird,  
but being human, are free to choose  
even between good and evil, life and death.

In July, in the warm sweet days of summer,  
we thank You for beauty.

The oaks cast their deep shadows on the lawn,  
and we thank You for love;

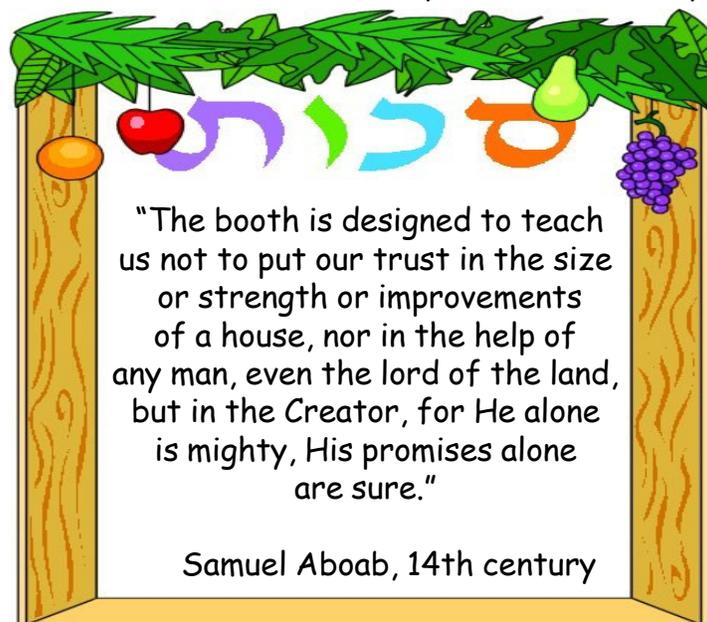
That we dwell in the shadow of Your love,  
that we are able to love,  
even as You love us.

Now at Sukkot, the apples hang ripe and  
heavy on the trees,  
the trembling leaves shine red and gold  
in the sunlight.

You are the source of the radiance of the sun,  
the bridegroom,  
and of the fruitfulness of the earth, his bride.

For shelter and freedom, for love and beauty,  
for all the harvest of earth and sun,  
of talent and spirit,  
For all Your blessings, we give thanks to You.

*Ruth Brin  
Mayim Rabim, Minneapolis, MN*



## The Sukkah That Grandpa Built c. 2006

This is the Sukkah that Grandpa Built.

There are the branches  
that cover the Sukkah that Grandpa built.

These are the fruits  
that hang from the branches  
that cover the Sukkah that Grandpa built.

These are the kids  
who string the fruits  
that hang from the branches  
That cover the Sukkah that Grandpa built.

These are the folks  
who help the kids  
who string the fruits  
that hang from the branches  
that cover the Sukkah that Grandpa built.

These are the guests -Jamie and Saul  
who greet the folks  
who help the kids  
who string the fruits  
that hang from the branches  
that cover the Sukkah that Grandpa built.

This is the lulav, green and tall,  
shaken by the guests - Jamie and Saul  
who greet the folks  
who help the kids  
who string the fruits  
that hang from the branches  
That cover the sukkah that Grandpa built.

This is the etrog, yellow and small  
that touches the lulav, green and tall  
shaken by the guests - Jamie and Saul  
who greet the folks  
who help the kids  
who string the fruits  
that hang from the branches  
that cover the Sukkah that Grandpa built.

These are the prayers recited by all  
over the etrog yellow and small  
that touches the lulav green and tall  
shaken by the guests, Jamie and Saul  
who greet the folks  
who help the kids  
who string the fruits  
that hang from the branches  
that cover the Sukkah that Grandpa built.

These are the memories we recall  
about Sukkot in early fall,  
when we hear the prayers recited by all  
over the etrog, yellow and small,  
and the lulav green and tall,  
shaken by guests -Jamie and Saul  
who greet the folks  
who help the kids  
who string the fruits  
that hang from the branches  
that cover the sukkah that Grandpa built.

*Rosalind Schilder  
Congregation Beth Shalom, Naperville, IL*





For everything there is a time,  
For every desire an opportunity,  
Beneath the heavens-  
A time for giving birth, a time to die,  
A time to plant, a time to uproot what is planted,  
A time to slay, a time to heal,  
A time to break, a time to build,  
A time to weep, a time to laugh,  
A time to mourn, a time to dance,  
A time for casting stones, a time to gather them,  
A time for embracing, and a time for holding back,  
A time to seek, a time to lose,  
A time to keep, a time to throw away,  
A time to tear, a time to mend,  
A time for keeping silent, and a time to speak,  
A time to love, a time to hate,  
A time for war, a time for peace.

**Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**

### **Please note:**

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"Mark, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the yield of your land, you shall observe the festival of Adonai [to last] seven days: a complete rest on the first day and a complete rest on the eighth day."

(Leviticus 23:39)