

SUKKOT

Sukkot, the third of the three pilgrimage festivals, is observed for seven days beginning on the 15th of Tishrei. The first two days are *yom tov* followed by five days of *chol hamoed*, the last of which is *Hoshanah Rabbah*. *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah* conclude the festival.

In Leviticus 23 Israel is commanded to dwell in booths for seven days and to rejoice with the fruit of hadar trees (*etrogim*), palm branches (*lulavim*), and branches from leafy trees (myrtle) and brook willows. While Sukkot is an agricultural festival during which we give thanks for a bountiful harvest, the Bible assigns a historical component as well. King Solomon dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem during Sukkot – an event commemorated in several haftarot for that festival.

LULAV AND ETROG

The rabbis developed rituals for the use of the lulav and etrog that have been continuous from Temple times. This passage from the Talmud discusses the proper way to hold the lulav and etrog, and explains why the *berakhah* is recited only over the lulav (*al natal lulav*):

Rabbah stated: the lulav [must be held] in the right hand and the etrog in the left. What is the reason? The former constitutes three commandments [the palm, the myrtle and the willow which are bound together] and the latter only one [as the right hand is regarded as the more important, and in it, therefore, one must hold the more important part of the species]. R. Jeremiah enquired of R. Zerika: Why in the blessing do we say only 'to take the palm branch'? Because it towers above the others.

Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 37b



JEWISH HOME BASICS

Etrog box

Lulav carrying case

Sukkah decorations

Ushpizim/ushpizot posters or cards

Words of Hiddur Mitzvah

Dr. Anne Lapidus Lerner

As a construction project, a sukkah is pretty straightforward. At least two and a half walls – not too tall, not too short – an open top more than half covered with a material that grew on a tree, and that has been cut from a tree. A fragile, constructed memento of a dim ancestral trek through the Sinai. But what we have made of it!

My childhood synagogue sukkah was a piece of art, a labor of love. The chain-link fence of the parking lot was wrapped in canvas and interwoven so thickly with evergreens that, entering, one stepped into an overwhelming sensory experience. There was color everywhere – oranges and lemons with raisin faces, gourds, carrots, and squash hanging from the cedar boughs on the roof and walls, a riot of color against a deep green backdrop. All real, no imitations. The aroma of the cedar mixed with the fragrance of the fruit and the taste of the honey cake and petit fours served off long tables by behatted sisterhood members as we filed in from children's services.

For me, this is an outstanding example of hiddur mitzvah, of taking the essentials of a mitzvah and infusing them with beauty and religious meaning, an act of dedication to make the spirit soar.

Sukkah

Southern Germany,
second half
of the 19th century
Wood, oil paint,
2 X 2.9 X 2.9 m
Gift of the Deller
Family with the help of
Heinrich Feuchtwanger
196/1
Collection The Israel
Museum, Jerusalem
Photo © The Israel
Museum,
Jerusalem
by Avraham Hay



The Fischach Sukkah

In the 19th century, Naftali and Zili Deller commissioned a local painter to decorate the walls of their sukkah. Their son Abraham and his wife Sofie erected the sukkah in the courtyard of their home in Germany every year until the Nazis came to power. In 1937 the sukkah was smuggled out of Germany and delivered to the Bezalel Museum in Jerusalem.

The central wall features Jerusalem, with the Western Wall at its hub, copied from a 19th century lithograph by Jerusalem artist Yehosef Schwartz. The other walls contain pictures of the village of

Fischach. On the right is Zili Deller at the entrance to her home; on the back is the local baron and patron of the Jews setting out to hunt. In the small frames are depictions of the holidays copied from prayer books printed in Sulzbach, Germany, in 1826.

Judaic Mosaic

VISITORS IN THE SUKKAH: USHPIZOT/USHPIZIN

A kabbalistic practice that has gained popularity is welcoming the *ushpizin* into the sukkah. Aramaic for guests, the *ushpizin* are seven biblical personalities – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David – who are invited, another one each night, into the sukkah to join in the celebrations.

When a man sits in this abode of the shadow of faith, the Divine Presence spreads her wings over him from above and Abraham and five other righteous ones make their abode with him. R. Abba said, “Abraham and five righteous ones [Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Aaron] and David with them. Hence it is written: ‘You [plural] shall live in booths seven days (*Leviticus 23.42*). . . and a man should rejoice each day of the festival with these guests who abide with him.

Zohar 103b

Recently, feminists have expanded the custom to include women, calling them *ushpizot*, using the feminine form. The recommended selection includes the female prophets named in the Talmud (*B. Megillah 14a-b*) – Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther. In the Talmud, each is associated with prophetic acts but medieval kabbalists later invested them with mystical symbolism. But also, each of these women reflects valued characteristics like faith, heroism, independence, and wisdom.

Sarah, through the miracle of Isaac’s birth, enables the fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham in which God promises that their progeny will become numerous and inherit the land of Israel.

Miriam helps to save her baby brother Moses (and by extension, the Jewish people) and then later leads the Israelite women in song and dance after the crossing of the Sea of Reeds.

Deborah the Bible's only female military hero and a crucial figure in the Israelite victory over the Canaanites, is also the only judge (*shofet*) to be called a prophet. (*Judges 4-5*)

Hannah, the most loved of Elkanah's two wives who is cursed with infertility, eventually gives birth to the prophet Samuel. (*1 Samuel 1-2*)

Abigail, the wife of the abusive Nabal, assists David when he is fleeing from Saul, and after she becomes a widow, marries David. (*1 Samuel 25*)

Huldah is a prophet who authenticates the scroll of law found in the temple during the time of King Josiah (mid-7th BCE). (*II Kings 22:10-20*)

Esther is chosen to become the new queen of Persia and eventually helps to save her people from annihilation.

Recitations for Ushpizin/ot

On each night another guest is addressed, for example:

Sarah, my exalted guest, may it please you to have all the exalted guests join me and you – Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther.

The spiritual guest of each day is invited before the meal and the following text is recited:

May it be Your will, Lord my God and God of our ancestors, to send Your presence to dwell in our midst and to spread over us the sukkah of Your peace, to encircle us with the majesty of Your pure and holy radiance. Give sufficient bread and water to all who are hungry and thirsty. Give us many days to grow old upon the earth, the holy earth, that we may serve You and revere You. Blessed by the Lord forever. Amen, amen.

Other Customs

Another Sukkot custom is to invite seven poor people to eat in the sukkah, so that the seven exalted guests from above join with the seven earthly guests, and the Shekhinah hovers over them all.

Sephardic Jews set aside a chair in the sukkah for the guest of the day. The chair is decorated and they announce that this is the chair of the ushpizin/ot. The chair remains empty throughout the meal, reminiscent of Elijah's cup at the Passover seder and chair at a circumcision. A plate of food is also left near the empty chair which is then sent to the poor with the note, "This is the share of the ushpizin/ot."

A number of internet sites offer resources and suggestions for crafting your own Ushpizot tradition.

www.kolot.org
www.ritualwell.org
www.jofa.org

Ellen Alt's beautifully illustrated and laminated Ushpizot poster can be ordered from www.haggadahsrus.com

Creative Judaic Arts Projects

We can invite our own guests, ushpizot (feminine), into our sukkot. Consider the matriarchs and other biblical women, but don't limit yourselves to the women found in the Bible.

There are several projects that can be done with this theme to enhance home or communal sukkot. All start with the same instruction: Choose your group of Jewish women to invite into your sukkah!

The Talmudic Seven: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther (see pages 14, 15)

Biblical Personalities: Eve, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Dena, Tamar, Miriam, Jephthah's daughter, Deborah, Yael, Hulda, Ruth, Esther, Susannah, and Judith.

Famous Jewish Women: Choose from the Beauty, Brains & Braun exhibit or *With Strength and Splendor: Jewish Women as Agents of Change*. Consider, among many others, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Lillian Wald, Rebecca Gratz, Rosa Sonnenschein, Fannie Rosenfeld, Ruth Handler, Bessie Moses.

Your Family Matriarchs: Use photographs of your grandmothers, aunts, sisters, daughters. Display the photograph on one side and a brief biography on the other.

Jewish Women Artists: Consider Louise Nevelson (sculptor), Cindy Sherman (photographer), Judy Chicago (multimedia artist), Annie Liebowitz (photographer), Helen Frankenthaler (abstract expressionist painter), Anna Ticho (Israeli landscape artist). Do a search for artists whose work appeals to you.

Prepare a brief study of the women you have selected for your project. Who are they, why are they important to us?

BANNERS AND POSTERS

Have a variety of materials available for a collage – paper, photos, fabric, lace, stickers, etc. Divide into groups and ask each group to create a collage illustrating its chosen woman. Place the finished collages on a poster board (which someone may have decorated with a background) and laminate.

Create a banner by attaching the material onto a long roll of paper.

Fiber artists: think about some of the canvas designed for use in a computer printer. A collage can be created with a base image on the canvas with fibers, lace, buttons, beads, etc. and stitched together.

Additional projects can
be found at
www.wlcj.org

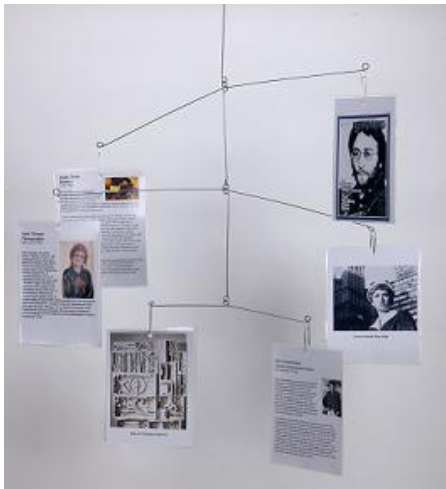
Antiqued Silver
Etrog Box

Family Sukkah
Decorating Project

Holiday Centerpieces

Paper Veggies

Sukkah Adornments



USHPIZOT MOBILES

Search for photos of women and/or their work. This example uses Jewish women artists. One side of each card is a photo of the artist and a brief biography. The second side is a copy of a piece of her art.

Print photos and any desired explanations. Cut to a uniform size and paste back to back. If the mobile is to be outside, consider laminating it. Punch holes in the top of the cards



Using a firm wire, create loops in the center and ends of three pieces. These pieces must be balanced, so measure to make sure the ends are equal distance to the center. Test by slipping a straight wire into the center loop; adjust if necessary

With three shorter pieces of wire, bend loops in ends only.

Connect the wires in the following order: Straight end to center loop to straight end to center loop to straight end to center loop.

Attach the photos to the wire assembly with large paper clips slipped through the holes in the photos and then into the wire loops of the mobile.

SUKKAH TABLE CORNUCOPIA

Buy a basket cornucopia.

Collect photographs of your family and those whom you have invited as guests. Mount these with straight pins on Styrofoam cubes.

Add miniatures of family rite-of-passage events such as a baby at its brit or simchat bat; a bride and groom at their wedding; the family at a favorite vacation spot.

Fill the cornucopia, embellishing with fresh fruits and vegetables, autumn leaves.

Thanks to florist
Sherry Wiesman,
Congregation Kneseth
Israel, Elgin, IL

SILK SUNFLOWERS WITH ARTICHOKE

A Sukkot Floral Arrangement

Stem Counts

Artichoke	1
Millet	1
Wild Buttercup	1
Phlox	1
Mexican Sunflower Bunch	1
Chilies	1
Sunflowers	3



Because it is still hot in some parts of the country at Sukkot, you can create a vibrant late summer arrangement. The silk sunflowers and the chilies are energizing and this playfulness is conveyed in this informal arrangement, which works best on a long table.

Raise the arrangement, if it will be on a side or buffet table, by turning a dishpan upside down or creating a platform of books and concealing them with table linens.

Hot glue trimmed foam into the container so it fits **very** tightly.

The artichoke and sunflowers are big but you don't want to make large holes in the foam so trim the stems to narrow points. Cut them at varying heights and place them facing different directions. Push the stems deep into the foam with the artichoke resting over the lip of the container to keep the container from toppling.

Sunflowers grow turning their faces to the sun. To replicate that, use Bouquet Holder (a spray-on glue) to hold them against the wall of the container.

Next place the wild buttercups, cutting the branches to give a natural appearance. Insert the longest one, which is shorter than the tallest sunflower, close to the center. Place the other stems slightly on the diagonal, varying their heights.

Put the Mexican sunflowers low so their foliage conceals the foam. Tuck little bits of amethyst flowers here and there. The fuzzy, wild phlox gives the arrangement a casual appearance. Again, vary the heights. Lastly, insert the chilies to look like they are dancing in the breeze. Don't be afraid to mix dried botanicals with fresh or silk flowers.

Complete the total look with a blue table cloth and dishtowels that have sunflower appliqués folded to create a table runner.

Fill little terra cotta pots and saucers with different beans that have the same colors as the arrangement. You can use some gourds as a nod to the holiday. The little pots could be filled with the seven species mentioned in the Bible, with almonds, or with the fruits of the season.