

## The Basics:

The holiday of Sukkot (pronounced soo-COAT) actually has three different names in the Torah.

1. *“Chag Ha-Sukkot,”* or *“The Festival of Booths,”* because we dwelled in booths while we were wandering in the desert for 40 years. But what’s a booth? The Sukkah is an outdoor structure that is more than a hut covered in uprooted palm branches or bamboo; it’s carefully designed to help us feel both vulnerable and protected; physical and spiritual; incomplete and full of joy; present in the moment and ready to move.
2. *“Chag Ha-Asif,”* or *“The Festival of Gathering.”* Like Passover and Shavuot, Sukkot is an agricultural harvest holiday where we express our thanks and gratitude for the bounty we’ve been given. But since the final gathering of crops for the agricultural year (in Israel) happens during Sukkot, it becomes known as THE gathering festival.
3. *“Zman Simchateinu,”* or *“Time of our Rejoicing,”* and *“He-Chag,”* or *“The Festival.”* Dwayne Johnson is The Rock, Sukkot is THE Festival. Simple as that. There are other Jerusalem Temple-era pilgrimage festivals in the Jewish calendar, true. But Sukkot, once again, takes the cake because there’s an ecstatic joy that accompanies it, and historically, these celebrations were an all-night affair. What were the Jews celebrating? Some say emerging from Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur with a clean slate with which to start the year, while others say it’s because of our successful and sufficient harvest.



*Sukkot Celebration, Moishe House Triangle, 2018*

The themes corresponding to each of these names for Sukkot frame the program ideas we’ve created for you this year. Take a look at each program or skip to the ones that interest you.

1. [Nothing to Wine About: A Sukkot Paint Night](#)
2. [Listen & Learn: A Sukkot Speaker Series](#)
3. [Sukkot and Self-Care: A Tranquili-Tea Workshop](#)
4. [Sustainable Sukkah: An Eco-Art Party](#)
5. [The Holiday of Harvest: A Reflection](#)

However you choose to celebrate Sukkot this year, ultimately, what we wish for you is that you celebrate this holiday with joy.

## Nothing to Wine About: A Sukkot Paint Night

By Loren Berman

Less scato or Mo'scato? The Jewish tradition has mixed reviews on wine, but there's one piece of wisdom it shares with us: in the appropriate and mindful context, wine can be sanctified as holy. As you bless the wine and pair the whites and reds with various cheeses and fresh berries under the Sukkah, open the evening with a brief conversation about the different themes of Sukkot and what they mean to you. [Themes](#) might include Joy, Nature, Vulnerability, Harvest, Water, and beyond. See this [Sefaria source-sheet](#) for Sukkot texts that highlight these themes, which can serve as inspiration for each participant's own Paint Night piece.

### MATERIALS:

- Acrylic or watercolor paint (watercolor is a bit more forgiving if you make mistakes because you can just add more water!)
- White stretched canvas for acrylics or watercolor paper
- Paint brushes
- Plates/bowls to hold paint
- Cups for water to wash off the brushes
- Something to cover the table, like a plastic tablecloth or newspaper

Feeling like you're not super artistic? Not to worry! You can get an outlined canvas [here](#), and all you have to do is fill in with paint. Or check out [Step By Step Painting](#) - the name says it all!

Prefer to put a cork in it and stick with water? You're in good company as Sukkot just happens to be the holiday of water. In fact, the Sages say that one who hasn't seen the Temple water-drawing ceremony (Simchat Beit HaShoeiva) has never felt the power of true joy in their life! Bring out the Toco Chico, La Croix, or infuse your own water with fresh berries, and paint away.

[Click here for the full program](#) with instructions, supplies, and Jewish texts!



*Paint Night with MHWOW, Emily McDonnell, 2017*

## Listen & Learn: A Sukkot Speaker Series

By Loren Berman & Leah Jalfon

The Zohar, the generations-old core text of the mystical Kabbalah, introduces the concept of [Ushpizin](#), the holy ancestors who visit our Sukkot each night. Which of your ancestors would you want to bring to your table (check out these [Biblical heroines](#))? Which heroes and people you admire would have wisdom and joy to share? Have they spoken or written special words that inspire you? You can decorate your Sukkah with pictures of these people and share stories about them.



*Let's Talk about Anti-Semitism, Baylee Less, 2019*

At the same time, the [Jewish tradition says](#) there is no full joy on Sukkot unless those less fortunate are celebrating with us. This Sukkot, we're asking ourselves: **Who is *not* being welcomed at our programs or in our community? What would it look like to invite them to share in our joy?**

Invite a speaker from that community to talk about their experience or show a documentary that tells the story from the point of view of the person on the outside. You can use MHWOW funds to rent a movie! Suggestions include, but of course, are not limited to...

### 1. A homeless or formerly homeless individual (especially relevant during Sukkot!)

On Sukkot, we step outside of our permanent homes and enter a temporary home. And yet, paradoxically, we are told to treat this temporary home as permanent. Who knows more about the scary challenge to "get comfortable" in temporary homes than people who are homeless? Connect with organizations like [Picture the Homeless](#) and hear first-hand experiences of people who are, or have been homeless.

Get inspired by [this Sukkah](#) built with cardboard signs made by homeless people or these [five bridge-building Sukkot](#) from around the world.

#### Film Choice:

[Shelter](#) - follows homeless teens and young adults who are fighting to stay alive in New Orleans, Louisiana

### 2. A refugee or immigrant

A Sukkah is a liminal space - not only between permanent and temporary, inside and outside, but between the Promised Land and the Land of Slavery. Jews stayed in Sukkot during the wandering in the wilderness as they escaped Egypt as refugees before they made it to their ultimate refuge of Israel.

#### Film Choice:

[Which Way Home](#) - follows three children who make a dangerous trek through Mexico en route to the U.S. border, atop the dangerous train known as "la bestia" in hopes of reuniting with their parents

### 3. Formerly incarcerated person

**Film Choice:** [13th](#) - explores the history of racial inequality in the United States, focusing on the fact that the nation's prisons are disproportionately filled with African-Americans

[Rikers: An American Jail](#) - brings you face to face with people who have endured incarceration at Riker's Island

### 4. Individual with a disability

**Film Choice:** [How to Dance in Ohio](#) - teenagers with autism learn social skills by preparing for a spring formal

### 5. Person of color

Film Choice: [The Hate U Give](#) - not a documentary, but an amazing movie about a young woman who witnesses the fatal shooting of her childhood best friend at the hands of a police officer

### 6. Member of the LGBTQ+ community

**Film Choices:**

[Trembling Before G-d](#) - gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews trying to reconcile their sexuality with their faith  
[\(A\)Sexual](#) - follows the growth of a community that experiences no sexual attraction

[Gaycation](#) - this is one of Leah's favorite shows! Ellen Page & her best friend Ian Daniel explore various LGBTQ cultures around the world. Each episode is set in a different country to see how different cultures treat the LGBTQ community.

### 7. A Lasting Change

Good tikkun olam programs spread awareness; great tikkun olam programs also take action. What can your community do to include those who are not always included? Click here for Molly Cram, Director of House Program's [Tikkun Olam Guidebook](#) to learn best practices for Tikkun Olam programs.

## Sukkot and Self-Care: A Tranquili-Tea Workshop

By Loren Berman

[Click here for the FULL program](#), including Jewish texts, discussion guide/questions, and tea blend recipes.

Welcoming guests and taking care of others is just as important as taking care of ourselves on Sukkot. Leviticus 23:39-43 describes the rituals of the holiday...

“On the first day you shall take **for yourselves** the product of hadar trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days.”



*Tea Shabbat, Nikki Berne, 2019*

The [text](#) clearly states that we are each to engage with the Four Species ourselves, and another text shows how the Four Species represent the body. There is a commandment that the Four Species need to be held together in one bunch, and if they are not all together, then one does not fulfill the mitzvah. This suggests that each part of our bodies needs its attention to express full joy and gratitude.

If feeling strong and healthy in our bodies is a critical component of joy, then our tradition suggests we take care of our bodies - and minds - and one way we can integrate the themes of Sukkot - like water and the autumnal harvest - into self-care is through the ancient art of making herbal teas.

[Click here for the full program](#) with Jewish texts, tea ingredients, and directions!

## Sustainable Sukkah: An Eco-Art Party

By Leah Jalfon

I'm sure there are millions of interpretations of the purpose of being in the sukkah during Sukkot, but I think one of them is so that we can be present. A sukkah doesn't have a TV or walls, so we can't help but look at the world around us and the people we're sharing our experiences with. It allows us to reflect on how we really want to spend our time together, whether that means turning off our phones, sharing what we want to achieve, or eating mindfully (here is a [mindful eating exercise](#) and some [environmentally friendly dishes to cook](#)).

One of the traditions of Sukkot is to decorate a sukkah with hanging fruit and gourds. I live in Charlotte, North Carolina (a large metropolitan city), I don't have a sukkah, and I'd really rather eat my fruit than hang it up. Fortunately, there are many ways you can bring the spirit of Sukkot to your program whether you have a sukkah or not.

### CHANGE YOUR SPACE

Little changes in your space can help you and your guests remember the significance of Sukkot. Move your table outside if the weather's nice, or in a different place so you can eat picnic-style on the floor. Even just adding some fresh flowers makes a difference!

## CREATE YOUR OWN SUKKOT DECORATIONS

There are countless crafts you and your friends could do together to bring in the spirit of Sukkot, and since Sukkot is traditionally celebrated outside, you can celebrate the natural world by using your recyclables to create art! Here are some of my favorites.

### HANGING GARDENS

How cute are these hanging gardens?! Here's a [video](#) with instructions on how to make one yourself. This is what you'll need:

- Plastic bottles
- [Needle tool](#)
- Potting soil
- Plants (or seeds if you want to watch them grow!)
- Yarn or twine



### COLLAGE BOTTLES

Collage glass or plastic bottles with tissue paper to create beautiful art that you can keep around well past Sukkot.

#### MATERIALS:

- Bottles
- Colored tissue paper
- Mod Podge
- Paint brushes (I think the foam ones work best)
- You can buy Mod Podge and foam brushes together [here!](#)



*Wine Bottle Decoupage, [Happy Hooligans](#), 2019*

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1. Prepare your bottles.** Peel off the labels. Stubborn labels come off easily if you add a 1/4 cup of washing soda to a sink full of hot water. Let the bottles soak for 30 minutes and the labels will slip off. Rinse bottles inside and out and set upside down to dry.
- 2. Tear or cut your tissue paper into pieces.** Each person at your program can do this for themselves as they go.
- 3. Apply the first layer of Mod Podge.** Brush some Mod Podge onto the bottle. It's best to work in small areas so the Mod Podge doesn't dry before you get to it with the tissue paper.
- 4. Apply tissue paper.** Press a piece of tissue paper into the Mod Podge and brush a little more Mod Podge over it to smooth out any wrinkles, coating the piece of tissue paper completely. The key here is not to use too much Mod Podge so you can still see the tissue paper! Continue to work around your bottle until it's covered.
- 5. Let dry.** Allow your bottles to dry completely in a warm, dry place.

## CARDBOARD TUBE CHAINS

Painting paper towel or toilet paper tubes is one of the easiest crafts to do, and you can hang them from your walls or ceilings for Sukkot.

Here's what you'll need:

- Paper towel or toilet paper rolls
- Acrylic paint
- Paintbrushes
- Glue
- Yarn or twine
- Something to cover the table (plastic tablecloth, newspapers, etc)

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Paint tubes.
2. Let them dry.
3. Cover the part of the string that will run through the tube in glue.  
Press the string into the inside of the tube as best you can.
4. Let dry again.
5. Hang up your decorations, send the pictures to your program participants, or share on social media and tag us @moishehouse!



*Paper Towel Roll Art,  
Crafty Morning, 2014*

After Sukkot, you can use these to create a larger piece to remember the memories you made!



*Toilet Paper Roll Flower, [So Pretty in Paint](#), 2012*

# The Holiday of Harvest: A Reflection

By Leah Jalfon

Even though it's the High Holidays, we know that the traditions you've created through MHWOW don't stop. You can easily integrate a discussion of the themes of Sukkot into your Shabbat dinner or Rosh Chodesh Well Circle. Guided by the Hebrew calendar and based on the rituals of Rosh Chodesh and the New Moon, [Well Circles](#) are groups of 6-12 friends who meet every month to story-tell, support each other, and share spiritual experiences. [Click here](#) to learn more about Well Circles and access program guides for each month.

## THE DISCUSSION

There are so many themes to discuss, but one in particular that I like is the harvest. Sukkot is the time where we express gratitude for the bounty we've been given. Sharing what you're grateful for doesn't just have to happen on Thanksgiving!

Since Sukkot is near the beginning of the Jewish new year, you can reflect on what you've "harvested" in the past year. What have you learned? What have you created? What are you planning to "grow" next season? An icebreaker question I like is: what is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

## THE ACTIVITY

Clearly we're on a craft kick this season. If you're also a crafting person, something you can do with friends is decorate pots and plant seeds to represent what you intend to "grow" in the coming year.

### MATERIALS:

*(yes, we can reimburse you for all of these!)*

- Small plant pots
- Acrylic paint
- Paint brushes
- Potting soil
- Plastic ziploc bags, small tupperware containers, or sealable jars
- Seeds or seed paper
- Something to cover the table (plastic tablecloth, newspaper, etc)
- Cups for water to rinse brushes and plates to hold paint

### INSTRUCTIONS:

Have everyone share their intention for the coming season. If you're using seed paper instead of seeds, people can write their intentions on the seed paper.

Paint your plant pots to illustrate your intention, or decorate however makes you smile!

If they're still drying by the end of your program, either send people home with their pot, seeds, and potting soil in individual bags, or keep them at your house to finish at your next program.



*Rosh Chodesh Iyar, Molly Cram, 2019*

