



## **SUKKOT: A SEASON OF GATHERING AND GIVING**

### **INTRODUCTION**

As a people with agricultural roots, Jews have found many ways to mark the seasonal and environmental changes that occur throughout the year. The *Shalosh Regalim*, the three pilgrimage holidays of our tradition (Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot), celebrate the three times each year that our ancestors journeyed to Jerusalem to make harvest offerings at the Temple. In addition to their agricultural nexus, Pesach celebrates the Exodus from Egypt, and Shavuot celebrates *Matan Torah*, the giving of Torah on Mount Sinai.

Similarly, Sukkot has numerous themes and areas of focus that encompass seasonal, historical and theological perspectives. It is among the festivals that fall in the month of *Tishrei* (Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simchat Torah), and thus it places emphasis not just on the cycles of the earth, but also the cycles of our lives. The celebration of Sukkot leads us to focus on the importance of shelter and housing, our mandate to welcome others into our homes, the environment and exigencies of nature, and how we use the food we gather from the land to feed ourselves and others. Just as the *sukkah* is fragile and subject to wind and rain, so, too, do we recognize the precious fragility of human life, and the importance of doing all we can to help those in need around us. When Sukkot concludes with the observance of Atzeret/Simchat Torah, we commemorate the conclusion of the cycle of Torah readings by finishing Deuteronomy and immediately beginning Genesis. This reminds us of our constant need to study all that Torah has to offer, including the teachings regarding social justice and righteousness, as well as those commandments that remind us that our work *l'taken et ha-olam*, to repair the world, is never complete.

Families, social action chairs, educators, youth group leaders, and other synagogue leaders will find many programs and projects that join together these themes of Sukkot with social action concerns within the following pages. The programs are divided by suggested venue and audience: Inside the Sukkah (for home or synagogue use) and Synagogue Programs, divided into youth and adult activities and religious school activities. Please keep in mind that these are merely suggested audiences – all programs can be adapted for other age groups or interests. Following the program suggestions are lists of websites and resources for additional information, and appendices with sample handouts and background information on the various social action themes.

We hope this material will assist you in making your Sukkot observance one that inspires you *lirdof tzedek v'shalom*, to pursue justice and peace in our world.

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## SUKKOT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

### Economic Justice

*“When a person eats and drinks in celebration of a festival, he is obligated to feed converts, orphans, widows, and others who are destitute and poor. In contrast, a person who locks the gates of his courtyard and eats and drinks with his children and his wife, without feeding the poor and the embittered, is not indulging in rejoicing associated with a mitzvah, but rather the rejoicing of his gut... This rejoicing is a disgrace...”*  
(Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Sh’vitat Yom Tov 6:18)

One of Sukkot’s names is *Z’man Simchateinu*, the Time of Rejoicing. While we are commanded to rejoice abundantly at this time of year, we also must assist others who are financially incapable of rejoicing. According to Maimonides, proper observance of Sukkot requires that we feed those around us who are in need. **Hunger and poverty** were facts of life in Maimonides’ time and unfortunately continue to be major concerns in our time. Thus, the scholar reminds us to be particularly attentive to the needs of others even in the midst of our celebration.

### Housing Issues

*“You shall dwell in sukkot for seven days, every person in Israel will dwell in sukkot. In order that your generations will know that I made the children of Israel dwell in Sukkot when I took them out of Egypt, I am the Lord your God.”* (Lev. 23:42-43)

The observance of Sukkot offers many opportunities to consider a variety of social action themes. We are commanded to live in temporary booths for seven days, to remind us of the time when our wandering ancestors had to dwell in sukkot following the exodus from Egypt. This naturally draws to mind those who are **homeless**, or who must live in temporary housing all year round, unable to procure a permanent home of their own. We have the privilege of returning to our homes following the seven days, but there are many who have no homes to which they can return.

### Welcoming the Stranger

*“When the people of Israel leave their homes and enter the sukkah for the sake of God’s name, they merit to welcome the Divine Presence there, and all the seven shepherds descend from Gan Eden and come to the sukkah as their guests.”*  
(Zohar, Emor 103a)

The Zohar teaches us that the sukkah contains such an intense concentration of spiritual energy that it becomes a worldly paradise, providing a holy space for the indwelling of our ancestors<sup>1</sup>. The seven exalted guests (*ushpizin*), who were traditionally invited into our sukkot, were: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David. Today, we also invite into our sukkot seven female leaders of Israel: Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, and Esther. As we invite these traditional, spiritual guests, we are reminded of the importance of inviting others into our sukkot. The mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim*, the **welcoming of guests**, extends to all those

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<sup>1</sup> Further information available at [http://www.socialaction.com/10-2000/ushpizin\\_sara.phtml](http://www.socialaction.com/10-2000/ushpizin_sara.phtml)

groups, friends and strangers, who we invite to share the bounty of our sukkah. Symbolically, we might invite all those who inspire us to strive for holiness; practically, we might invite all those in need to partake of our hospitality.

### **Environmental Concerns**

*"You shall indeed go out in joy and be led forth in peace. Before you mountains and hills shall shout aloud; and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the briar, a cypress shall arise; instead of a thorny nettle, a myrtle shall arise. These shall stand as a testimony to the Eternal, as an everlasting sign that shall not perish." (Isaiah 55:12-13)*

The seven days we spend in the sukkah allow us to interact with the **environment** around us in a way that our permanent homes do not. Eating and sleeping in sukkot force us to feel the wind, breathe the outside air, and gaze at the sun, moon, and stars. As we encounter the natural world during this season, Sukkot inspires us to address current issues that affect the environment on a daily basis.

### **Life Cycle**

*"One generation goes, another comes. But the earth remains the same forever." (Ecclesiastes 1:4)*

Ecclesiastes is the principal text often associated with Sukkot. One of its primary themes is the cycle and continuation of life. It reminds us that "a season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). The text, noting the vanity, struggle, and challenges that face humanity at different life stages, turns our attention towards matters that relate to **age and the life-cycle**. This awareness can motivate us to advocacy on issues facing older adults, children's issues and age discrimination.

## **SIMCHAT TORAH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Simchat Torah ("Celebration of the Torah") celebrates the conclusion of our cycle of Torah reading, completing the final verses of Deuteronomy and immediately beginning the first book, Genesis. The cycle of our Torah readings reminds us of the cycles of nature – as we roll the scrolls, the seasons change, and we with them.

### **Environmental Concerns**

*"After creating the first human beings, God led them around the Garden of Eden and said: 'Look at My works! See how beautiful they are, how excellent! For your sake, I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil or destroy My world – for if you do, there will be no one to repair it after you.'" (Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13)*

Simchat Torah is a perfect time to couple our love for Torah with our concerns for the environment. As we begin anew the readings of Genesis, we are reminded of our obligations as caretakers of God's creation. From this point in the Jewish calendar year, we begin to recite the

blessing for rain during our prayer service, reflecting the agricultural seasons of the Land of Israel and our reliance on the natural world for our sustenance and well-being. Together with Sukkot, Simhat Torah serves as a reminder of our connection to, and reliance upon, the natural world around us

### **Life cycle**

The cycle of Torah readings, moving from end to beginning, mirrors the cycle of life. We read the last lines of Torah with sadness as we learn that Moses' life is coming to an end. We imagine the feelings he must have experienced, knowing that he would never reach the Promised Land, reflecting on his lifetime of struggle and regrets as well as achievements. Today's seniors face physical challenges and limitations, confronting discrimination and prejudice just at the time they should be venerated for their wisdom and accomplishments. Our elders require our sensitivity and support, and advocacy on public policy matters that could help improve their lives.

And yet, despite the bittersweet conclusion of one part of the journey, without pause, the cycle is renewed and we start the process all over again. We march and dance with the Torah scrolls around and around, celebrating our community's ongoing commitment to study and love of the Torah. Turning our thoughts to our youngest students during Consecration ceremonies, we witness with joy the birth of Jewish learning. We know our precious children have needs and concerns that we must address to make sure they remain safe and hopeful. The teachings contained within the Torah have lessons for us at all stages of the lifecycle.

### **IN THE SUKKAH: OPPORTUNITIES TO HIGHLIGHT SOCIAL JUSTICE**

**The Ushpizin:**<sup>2</sup> Tradition encourages us to welcome seven holy guests into our sukkot, one for each night of the week. In a modern variation to this custom, each night can be connected to a related social action theme. Some examples might be:

First Night: On the first night we welcome Abraham and Sarah, the primary exemplars of hospitality and welcoming. They teach us *Hesed*, lovingkindness. Whom do we invite into our homes? What are other groups that we might welcome more warmly into our lives, homes, or communities?

Second Night: On this night, we welcome Isaac and Rebecca, who teach us *Gevurah*, strength. Isaac is an exemplar of powerlessness – one who was passive and had no will of his own. On the other hand, Rebecca, by causing Jacob to take his brother's birthright, is an exemplar of proactivity, taking control over the future of her people. When might it be best to sit back and subdue ourselves, and when is it important to take action for what we believe in? What are examples of actions that we can be taking in order to ensure a better future for humankind?

Third Night: Tonight, we welcome Jacob and Rachel. Jacob fell in love with Rachel because of her beauty, rejecting her sister, Leah, who had "weak eyes." What role does physical appearance play in our lives? How can we embrace diverse beauty concepts that recognize the value in various cultures and backgrounds? In what ways do we

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<sup>2</sup> Idea based on "Ushpizin: Invoking the Lives and Teachings of our Biblical Ancestors," by Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow, found at [www.socialaction.com](http://www.socialaction.com).

discriminate on the basis of physical characteristics and abilities? How can we ensure justice and equality for all, regardless of appearance?

Fourth Night: On the fourth night, we welcome Yocheved and her son, Moses. Yocheved ensured the survival of the Jewish people by defying the ruling power and saving Moses. Moses' acts of leadership resulted in our freedom from slavery. They encourage us to remember the importance of standing up for what is right and taking action to bring about justice for ourselves and others. Today, are there others who are still struggling for their freedom? What is our responsibility to those people?<sup>3</sup>

Fifth Night: On this night, we welcome Miriam and her brother, Aaron. Miriam and Aaron are known for their words: Miriam led the women in song at the shore of the sea, and was also punished for spreading gossip about her sister-in-law. Aaron was Moses' spokesperson, standing up to Pharaoh and helping the Israelites find freedom. How do we use our speech – to hurt or demean others, or to make the world a better place? How can we use communication to create change? What are some specific ways we can raise our voices to speak out for social justice?

Sixth Night: Tonight we welcome Joseph and his Egyptian wife, Osnat. After suffering injustice and servitude, Joseph became quite powerful in the land of Egypt. Both Joseph and Osnat are symbols of wealth, power, and abundance. The Israelites found refuge in Egypt as they fled famine; so too, many now come to America to find a better life. How might this analogy affect our perception of America's role in the world? What should our sense of responsibility and action be in light of our overall wealth and power?

Seventh Night: On the last night of Sukkot, we welcome David and his wife, Michal. Although he is remembered as a great leader, as king, David shed much blood and abused the power of his office for personal gain. Today as well, world leaders have the capacity to make war or peace, to use their authority to help others or to achieve personal profit. Do our leaders use their power wisely? If not, what is our responsibility to make sure that they do?

**Sukkot guests and honorees:** Sukkot is an excellent opportunity to honor those who provide produce and healthy food throughout the rest of the year. Invite a local farmer or farm worker to your home or congregational sukkah, and allow him/her to speak about the challenges of growing healthy food in the local ecosystem. A farm worker might be asked to speak about the difficulties working around pesticides and the dangers of poor working conditions. Other sukkot guests might be invited to receive honors for their justice work in the community.

**Recycled Sukkah:** Use as many recycled materials as possible in the building of your sukkah. The Northwest Jewish Environmental Project<sup>4</sup> (Portland, OR) launched a campaign in 2003 to encourage its members to use recycled materials in the construction of their sukkot. This project can promote an appreciation of the importance of buying and using environmentally sustainable products.

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<sup>3</sup> NFTY members may want to pay special attention to the theme of slavery, as part of NFTY's chosen social action theme for the 2004-2005 program year. Additional information can be found on the NFTY website at: [www.nfty.org/resources](http://www.nfty.org/resources).

<sup>4</sup> For more information go to [www.nwjep.org](http://www.nwjep.org).

## IN THE SYNAGOGUE: OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN SOCIAL JUSTICE

### YOUTH AND ADULT PROGRAMS

#### Housing & Economic Justice

**Beit Tikvah: House of Hope:** As Sukkot reminds us of the importance of permanent housing, use the holiday season as motivation to begin a building project for a family in need. For many years, [Congregation B'nai Israel](#) (Bridgeport, CT) was involved with the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity, supporting existing work crews and making financial donations. In the summer of 1997, members of the congregation decided that it was time for B'nai Israel to sponsor and build a house on its own. Funds for the house were raised over a six-month period, with every element of the synagogue family participating. In the end, over 750 congregants contributed more than \$60,000. Groundbreaking for the house took place in May 1998, and the house was named Beit Tikvah, House of Hope. Work crews overflowed with volunteers, including many who had never been to Bridgeport's inner city. Nursery school children and seniors made lunches for the workers, and members of the other Reform synagogue in the area joined in the work. More than 300 people participated in the construction. The family that now lives in Beit Tikvah has developed a close bond with the congregation. For a detailed program guide with instructions for creating a home-building project like this, advocacy topics, Jewish text materials, and background information on the housing crisis, go to <http://www.rac.org/pubs/poverty.html>.

**Autumn Warm-Up Clothing Drive:** Sukkot often signals the end of summer and the beginning of the cooler seasons. A clothing drive held as the weather gets colder is a simple yet very important mitzvah. Bring new and slightly-used coats, gloves, hats, mittens, wool socks, etc. to your temple anytime during the week of Sukkot. Adult, child, and toddler sizes are often in need. By doing your share, you can make the winter months warmer for someone in need. Contact local shelters to see where your donation will be most needed.

**Congregational Shelter:** Sukkot is an excellent time to consider starting a shelter program. [Congregation Rodeph Shalom](#) (New York, NY) created its Shelter for Homeless Men in response to an appeal from former Mayor Edward Koch. The shelter opened in March 1983, and serves eight homeless men during New York's most bitter months, from October through May. The program has assistance and guidance from the Partnership for the Homeless and the City's Human Resources Administration. Administered entirely by lay leadership, over 200 congregants volunteer at the shelter program, including senior citizens and young children from the religious school. Most of the guests are from minority groups, but a number of Jewish men have been referred to the congregation. In addition to the direct benefit of serving those in need of shelter, the program has created an interest in longer-term solutions to homelessness. The synagogue helped create Beyond Shelter, a group of synagogues and other religious institutions working to promote permanent, affordable housing for the homeless. Many Reform congregations participate in the Interfaith Hospitality Network, hosting shelter guests for a week at a time. For more information about these projects, see the congregational features in the Fain Award program guides from 2001 and 2003 at [www.rac.org/pubs/fain03.pdf](http://www.rac.org/pubs/fain03.pdf) and [www.rac.org/social/fain01.html](http://www.rac.org/social/fain01.html).

**Sukkah Sleep-In:** Traditionally, we are commanded to sleep in the sukkah all seven nights of the holiday. Although many no longer have an opportunity to do so, our congregations can hold a one-night "Sleep-In" for youth or adults to increase awareness and understanding of

homelessness and housing concerns. Activities can include sandwich-making, text study, discussion, letter writing, and more. The evening concludes by all attendees sleeping outside in the sukkah.

**Sukkot Sock Hop:** Your congregation can combine a fun Sukkot social event with important social action goals. The social action committee of [Temple Beth El](#) (Flint, MI) sponsored a "sock hop" dance with the admission fee of one package of new socks, T-shirts, or underpants. All items were collected at the dance and donated to the needy.

**Affordable Housing:** The URJ Department of Religious Living has created a useful text study on the issue of affordable housing as it relates to Sukkot, which can be utilized to encourage discussion, as well as motivate activities to address this important issue. The complete program, including necessary texts, is available at <http://urj.org/holidays/hhd03.pdf>.

**Living Wages and Shelter:** The Progressive Jewish Alliance in Santa Monica, CA, held a Sukkot event to teach about living wages, the importance of permanent shelter, and the connections to the holiday. Their goal was to promote better wages for hotel and other tourism-industry workers employed near the Santa Monica beachfront. The event included speeches by a rabbi, a hotel worker, and a Jeopardy-style game on living-wage issues. Such living wages campaigns are taking place all over the country.

**Ushpizin Chair Project:** Invite all those artistically inclined in the synagogue to decorate chairs in honor of the *ushpizin* guests symbolically invited into the sukkah. The project can take place from the end of Yom Kippur through the end of Sukkot. Encourage participants to include meaningful texts or quotations on the chairs and use different materials, paints, or techniques. At the end of the project, hold a fundraising auction of the chairs, with proceeds going to a homeless shelter, a food pantry, or a local environmental group. This idea is based on a project created by [Congregation Shomrei Torah](#) (Santa Rosa, CA).

## **Environmental Awareness**

**Decorate and Donate:** Hold a synagogue-wide event celebrating Sukkot while encouraging awareness of the needs of local farmers. At [Temple B'nai Israel](#) (Kalamazoo, MI) a service is held on Shabbat afternoon in the sukkah, which includes decorating and celebrating. Then the congregation joins in a potluck dinner and havdalah service. Congregants are encouraged to support local farmers by using locally grown produce for their potluck dishes. Additionally, the attendees are requested to bring a bag of apples, which can also be locally grown or picked, to be collected and donated to those in need through a local organization.

**Bereshit – Up Close and Personal:** Hold a retreat in connection to Sukkot and/or Simchat Torah focusing on the environmental themes of the holidays and *Parashat Bereshit*, the creation of the world. The New Jersey – West Hudson Valley Regional Council held a Shabbat retreat themed, “Confronting Creation,” in the midst of the Hackensack Meadowlands. The day-long workshop was devoted to learning about the Meadowlands – an endangered wetlands adjacent to the New York metropolitan area – and about the efforts which had been expended to save it from the threat of extinction. The day involved an outdoor service which included an environmental-themed *d’var Torah*, and an eco-cruise tour of the Meadowlands aboard a specially-rigged pontoon boat. This enabled the participants to view the wildlife and plant life of the area – much of it a direct result of preservation efforts by local environmental groups. They learned that, not too long ago, the Meadowlands had been regarded as a dumping ground for construction debris,



garbage, and toxic manufacturing by-products. Following the cruise, the group learned about sacred teachings, the environment and the importance of advocacy on behalf of environment preservation.

**Sukkot Gleaning Project:** Glean local crops in order to donate them to the hungry and impoverished. [Judea Reform Congregation](#) (Durham, North Carolina) runs a yearly Sukkot gleaning project for synagogue families in which they gather sweet potatoes on a local farm to be donated to the hungry all over the country. They worked in conjunction with The Society of St. Andrew,<sup>5</sup> which provides a roster of farms that allow such gleaning projects. In 2003, Judea Reform gleaned over 6000 sweet potatoes.

**Greening the Synagogue:** Sukkot can inspire your congregation to maintain environmentally sound and healthy procedures in the operation of the temple building. Begin an initiative to evaluate current procedures to determine where changes can be made to save energy and use ecologically friendly products throughout the building. Outside, reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides or other dangerous chemicals on synagogue property. Explore ways to reduce energy use in the building by changing light bulbs, improving window treatments and other means. Encourage members to do the same at home. The URJ has prepared some helpful tips and suggestions that can be found on their website <http://urj.org/small/greening.html>.

**Environmental Mitzvah Week:** Create special environmental programming throughout the entire week of Sukkot for all ages. Religious school students and youth groups can plant gardens on synagogue property to beautify the grounds and grow fruits and vegetables for use in future sukkot. Puppets can be made out of recycled materials to donate to a local shelter or hospital. Youth can clean parks or volunteer at a local animal shelter. Adults can assist in cleaning local zoos, planting scent-gardens for the blind, distribute informational ecology brochures around town, and more. Post signs around the temple with environmental messages, such as a message about water conservation near the drinking fountain or about energy use by the light switches.

**Create a “Teva” Committee:** Social Action Committees can create a sub-group called a “Teva” (nature) committee. [Temple Emek Shalom](#) in Ashland, OR created one such committee, which organizes creative programming all year round, particularly on holidays such as Sukkot, Passover, and Tu B’Shevat. The Teva Committee can assist the building of sukkot on synagogue property, as well as at members’ homes. A special hike aimed at appreciating local ecology and nature can be organized. Contact COEJL, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, for more information on starting a Teva committee ([www.coejl.org](http://www.coejl.org)).

**Solar Power:** If your congregation has been hoping to switch to solar power, Sukkot is an excellent time to dedicate your new energy-efficient system. [Congregation Shir Hadash](#) (Los Gatos, CA) taught environmental consciousness, related to the holiday’s themes of harvesting and nature, by beginning to use a new solar-power system during the Sukkot season.

## Life Cycle Issues

**Shared Care:** Sukkot can provide inspiration for beginning a year’s worth of activities for the area’s elderly. One such program is entitled “Shared Care,” an interfaith effort to provide day care services and for the frail and elderly. It is co-sponsored by three congregations in Boca Raton, [Temple Beth El](#), the First Presbyterian Church, and St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church, and

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<sup>5</sup> For more information, contact the Society of St. Andrew at [www.endhunger.org](http://www.endhunger.org).

is open to the community. Based at Temple Beth El, trained volunteers from all three sponsoring congregations run the program. Volunteers meet with doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists, and others, to assist the participants with a variety of ailments, including Parkinsons, Alzheimers, and other afflictions of old age. The 30 volunteers, representing all three sponsoring congregations, include retired nurses, art teachers, a doctor, a vocalist, and a physical education instructor. All are honored at year's end with a luncheon. Activities include discussions, music, arts and crafts, and chair exercises. Once a month, the program becomes intergenerational, with the children of the Temple Beth El nursery school joining the elderly participants for arts and crafts or chair exercise games. All holidays and festivals are celebrated, and it is not unusual during the winter holiday season to hear the Catholic children from St. Joan of Arc singing Christmas carols and the Temple Beth El children singing Chanukah songs.

**Phone Companions for Seniors:** Although Sukkot encourages us to welcome others into our homes, there are some who are homebound, and unable to visit due to lack of mobility. Use Sukkot as an opportunity to reach out to these members of our communities. On weekday mornings, senior volunteers from [Temple Shalom](#) (Succasunna, NJ) and the surrounding community meet at the synagogue and make reassurance phone calls to homebound elderly people. The calls help the elderly maintain their independence while giving them contact with the outside world. Calls take about two hours of the volunteer's time. Temple Shalom donates its facility to the program, which is coordinated by Volunteers For Morris County/R.S.V.P. The project is sponsored nationally by the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, an office of the National Senior Service Corporation, 202/606-5000. Find out if your county has such an outreach program seeking new partners, and if not, begin a program at your congregation. For more information, you can contact Volunteers For Morris County/R.S.V.P. at 201/538-7947, [Temple Shalom](#), or [National Senior Service Corporation](#).

**Outreach to Seniors:** Plan a community-wide social action project for the community's elderly that not only involves members of all ages, but can also be continued throughout the year. [Temple Shaaray Tefila's](#) (New York, NY) ten-year-old Keshet Program is an outreach effort serving 120 Jewish seniors, but it also serves as a means to engage interested volunteers. Before Shabbat services, volunteers set up tables on which donated goods are set out. After services each person takes a shopping bag and moves down the rows of tables, packing the bags in assembly-line fashion. Holiday cards made by students from the religious school are tied onto the bags with ribbon. The bags are then delivered by volunteers to seniors in the neighborhood. Caring volunteers have established on-going personal relationships with the seniors, bringing to both seniors and volunteers alike a sense of helping and healing someone in a difficult world. The Keshet Program also runs a Caregivers Support Group for people caring for an aging or ill spouse or parent. There is also a bereavement group that meets monthly.

**Take a senior citizen to the polls:** During an election year, Sukkot is a good time to focus energy for 'get-out-the-vote' initiatives. There is a large constituency of homebound, sight-impaired, hearing-impaired and wheelchair-bound individuals who would gladly participate in the voting process if only it were made easier for them. By reaching out to seniors and disabled citizens and communicating through newsletters and announcements that their special needs will be attended to by trained volunteers, you can perform an important mitzvah. Special arrangements may include rides to the polling place, changing individuals' polling locations to those that are more accessible, arranging for senior residences to become polling places, and curbside registration and/or voting. For more information about such projects, see the Commission on Social Action's 2004 Get Out The Vote Guide at: <http://www.rac.org/pubs/vote04.html>.

## Interfaith Activities

**Sukkat Shalom, Sukkah of Peace:**<sup>6</sup> In the times of the Temple in Jerusalem, Jews sacrificed 70 bulls during the week of Sukkot to atone for sins, not just committed by themselves, but also for the Biblical “seventy nations” of the world. This tradition shows us the importance of praying and acting for the wellbeing of all nations, not just Israel. Sukkot is an excellent time to welcome representatives from the local Arab-American community to join us in our Sukkot to engage in dialogue, debate, and learning about the current situation in the Middle East. Words of peace and sharing between our two groups, particularly at a time of strife in the Middle East, can be most meaningful for all. Rabbis Gary M. Bretton-Granatoor and Andrea L. Weiss have published a book through the URJ Press entitled, [Shalom/Salaam: A Resource for Jewish-Muslim Dialogue](#). The book contains articles and programs that can help initiate and facilitate interfaith dialogue in the community.

**Sukkah Sichah:**<sup>7</sup> The word Sukkah sounds much like the Hebrew word for conversation, *sichah*. Sukkot can thus be an excellent opportunity for discussion about housing issues and homelessness. An evening program based on this idea can involve the following components:

- Invite interfaith groups to join you in the sukkah and discuss community-housing issues.
- Invite representatives from local housing agencies to speak and facilitate a discussion.
- Divide attendees into smaller groups to analyze their personal attitudes towards helping others, including the role that religious or ethnic background may play in their opinions.
- At the conclusion of dinner, announce a plan in conjunction with Habitat for Humanity or another local housing initiative to take place during the Sukkot week.

## RELIGIOUS SCHOOL PROGRAMS

**Stone Soup:** The [URJ Department of Small Congregations](#) created a wonderful family education program using the classic folktale entitled, “Stone Soup.” The story revolves around a poor man who visits a village in which no one wants to welcome him, due to the terrible poverty. The visiting man decides to create a “stone soup” for the community. When they see him, they think that the soup will taste terrible, so they begin to slowly bring vegetables and seasonings from their homes to contribute. Throughout the day, the soup begins to smell delicious, and the townsfolk learn that, though they are each poor, they can work together to create enough food for everyone. This will teach the children about the importance of working to feed all those who are hungry in the world around us. The entire program is available at <http://uahc.org/small/pdffl/sukkot.pdf>, or by contacting the Department of Synagogue Management at 212/ 650-4040.

**Breaking the Circle of Hate:** The Sukkot theme of “welcoming the stranger” encourages us to engage in multicultural and interfaith discussions. Programs that begin during the week of Sukkot can then be extended throughout the year. [Temple Har Zion](#) (Thornhill, Ontario) created

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<sup>6</sup> Idea courtesy of an article entitled, “The Sukkah of Peace,” by Rodger Kamenetz, found at [www.beliefnet.com/story/46/story\\_4674.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/46/story_4674.html).

<sup>7</sup> Courtesy of [www.hillel.org](http://www.hillel.org).

a one-day event designed to sensitize the congregation's youth to anti-semitism and racism. The success of the program, in which over 120 people participated, was due in large part to the creation of several age-appropriate workshops. The senior youth group heard a lecture entitled "Anti-Semitism on Campus," the congregation's younger children learned to express their concerns artistically in a class called "Racism," and adult workshops focused on strategies to confront racism, neo-Nazism, and Holocaust revisionism. Following the one-day program, Temple Har Zion reached out to the community, creating numerous interfaith educational events and multicultural dialogues culminating in an interfaith retreat.

**Visit an Organic Farm:** In the days preceding Sukkot, organize a religious school trip to a local organic farm. The students can be taught about the importance of organic produce by explaining its healthier qualities and impact on the land and the environment. At the farm, students can gather natural *schach* and sukkah decorations, harvest fruits and vegetables for Sukkot meals, as well as collect produce to be donated to a local food bank. Invite the farmer to speak to the students regarding the challenges of growing healthy food and the dynamics of the local ecosystem.

**Planting Winter Grains:** Sukkot is a wonderful time to plant grains that can later be harvested during the Passover season. [Temple Emanuel](#) of the Merrimack Valley (Lowell, MA) sets aside a plot of soil on synagogue property to plant winter grains. As each religious school class visits the sukkah to wave the lulav and etrog, the students spread a handful of wheat, rye, or barley on the prepared soil, thus sowing the spring harvest. The progress of the growth is watched each Sunday until Passover. At the second Seder, held at the congregation, the attendees gather outside to harvest the first growing grains, tie them in a sheaf, and declare the start of the counting of the Omer. Thus, Sukkot and Passover are linked in their connection to the harvest.

**Adopt a Park:** As Sukkot inspires us to appreciate the natural world around us, we become more aware of our responsibility to keep nature beautiful and clean. Each religious school class can select or be assigned a local park, street, beach, lake, river, etc., and be responsible for cleaning up that particular area. The clean up can take place during religious school hours or at another specially designated day. The project can be started during the week of Sukkot and can be extended throughout the year.

## **HELPFUL RESOURCES**

*A Garden of Choice Fruit: 200 Classic Jewish Quotes on Human Beings and the Environment.* Wyncote, Pennsylvania: Shomrei Adamah, 1991.

*54 Ways You Can Help the Homeless.* Rabbi Charles A. Kroloff. West Orange, NJ: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, Inc. and Behrman House, Inc., 1993.

*Judaism and Ecology: A Hadassah Study Guide in Cooperation with Shomrei Adamah, Keepers of the Earth.* New York: Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc. and Shomrei Adamah, 1993.

*Shalom/Salaam: A Resource for Jewish-Muslim Dialogue.* New York: UAHC Press, 1993.

*To Till and to Tend: A Guide to Jewish Environmental Study and Action.* New York: The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life.

## SOCIAL ACTION WEBSITES

### **Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism ([www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org))**

The official website of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism can be searched for resolutions, initiatives, and information on the social action themes of Passover. The social action program bank ([www.rac.org/social/bank.html](http://www.rac.org/social/bank.html)) contains many suggestions surrounding Sukkot themes and programming ideas.

### **Union for Reform Judaism ([www.urj.org](http://www.urj.org))**

The Union's website contains a wide variety of resources on Jewish holidays, rituals and social action ideas. The Department of Worship, Music and Religious Living has a webpage dedicated to Sukkot with many helpful materials:

<http://urj.org/holidays/sukkot.shtml>.

### **NFTY ([www.nfty.org/resources/socialaction/](http://www.nfty.org/resources/socialaction/))**

NFTY's website contains materials for social action chairs of youth groups around the country. The above link goes to NFTY's Social Action page, which provides resources and program ideas on a wide variety of issues..

### **Kesher: Connecting Reform Jews on Campus ([www.keshernet.com](http://www.keshernet.com))**

Kesher provides a Social Action Resource page with programming ideas in a number of areas, including Hunger, Environment, Gun Control, Literacy, and more. They also include links to other major Jewish and social action oriented organizations.

### **Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life ([www.hillel.org](http://www.hillel.org))**

Hillel provides opportunities for Jewish students to explore and celebrate their Jewish identity through its global network of over 500 regional centers, campus Foundations and Hillel student organizations. The Hillel website provides a wide variety of materials for college students and beyond. Following the Jewish resources page, then clicking on "Holidays and Rituals" will link to the Sukkot section. Hillel offers extensive resources, readings, Divrei Torah, and Seders available for use.

### **MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger ([www.mazon.org](http://www.mazon.org))**

MAZON offers a number of readings and resources relating to issues of hunger for use during Sukkot and throughout the year.

### **Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life ([www.coejl.org](http://www.coejl.org))**

The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) promotes environmental education, scholarship, advocacy, and action in the American Jewish community. It's website provides environmental program ideas for congregations and individuals during Jewish holidays, including a special section on Sukkot, available at:

[www.coejl.org/celebrate/suk\\_eco.shtml](http://www.coejl.org/celebrate/suk_eco.shtml).

### **Socialaction.com ([www.socialaction.com/jewish\\_holidays.html](http://www.socialaction.com/jewish_holidays.html))**

Socialaction.com is an online magazine dedicated to pursuing justice, building community, and repairing the world. A wealth of materials for social action-based

programming, readings, and supplements related to Sukkot and other holidays can be found at the above link.

**AVODAH: the Jewish Service Corps ([www.avodah.net](http://www.avodah.net))**

AVODAH: the Jewish Service Corps is a yearlong program combining front-line anti-poverty work, Jewish study, and community-building. It provides an opportunity for young adults to live out and deepen their commitments to Jewish life and social change through a year of work in low-income communities in New York City or Washington, DC. Its website contains several sample text studies related to Sukkot and social action concerns, which are available on line at:

<http://yschulman.org/avodah/pdf/159SukkotSecurityandRejoicing.pdf>, and  
<http://yschulman.org/avodah/pdf/209SukkotTodaysAltarsSupportForthePoor.pdf>.

**Myjewishlearning.com ([www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Sukkot.htm](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Sukkot.htm))**

A great site for general information, applications, and study materials surrounding the observance of Sukkot.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to all the colleagues and friends who reviewed this publication and provided guidance for this series of manuals on the social action links to the Jewish holidays, including **Mark Pelavin**, Associate Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, **Rabbi Sue Ann Wasserman** and **Rabbi Kim Geringer** of the URJ Department of Worship, Music and Religious Living, and **Francie Schwartz**, Adult Learning Coordinator of the URJ Department of Lifelong Jewish Learning. We are also grateful to **Alexis Rice**, our webmaster extraordinaire, who did an amazing job getting this manual on line with little time to do so, and to Deena Fox and Janine Villanueva, who offered their support and advice throughout the duration of this project.

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