Repair the World

FALL NATIONAL DAYS OF JEWISH SERVICE 2026

Creating Space

Sukkot and Community Care

Jewish Service Learning Facilitation Resource

September 10 – October 10, 2026

Sukkot is a holiday about stepping outside our comfort zones and into connection. For one week each year, some Jews build and dwell in a *sukkah*—a temporary outdoor shelter that reminds us of life's impermanence, our shared vulnerability, and our dependence on one another. The holiday invites us to slow down, gather with family, friends, and neighbors, and practice gratitude for both the harvest and the relationships that sustain us.

Go out into nature, build yourself an impermanent structure, bring your most cherished items, and dwell there for seven days. Once you have built your humble dwelling, welcome those you love, those you've just met, and those you've yet to know—bring them close, and your ancestors will follow, bringing peace. Sukkot invites us to reflect on how we can reconnect with people, the natural world, and values that can be easy to overlook in the busyness of daily life.

Jewish Learning on Welcoming & Hospitality during Sukkot

Mishneh Torah, Rest on a Holiday 6:17-18

The Mishneh Torah is a code of Rabbinic Jewish religious law authored by Maimonides. One of the most organized, comprehensive, and influential works of Jewish law, The Mishneh Torah was compiled between 1170 and 1180 CE, and systematically categorizes and clearly explains all aspects of Jewish observance, including those applicable only in Temple times.

> On the eight days of Sukkot one is obligated to be joyful and of a good heart on them—he, his children, his wife, the members of his household and all who accompany him. As it is stated (Deuteronomy 16:14), ושמחת בחגך והיית אך שמח, "And you shall rejoice in your holiday, etc."

> While eating and drinking, one must also feed the stranger, the orphan, the widow, and others who are vulnerable and living in poverty. Anyone, however, who locks the doors of his courtyard and eats and drinks along with his wife and children, without giving anything to eat and drink to the poor and the desperate, does not observe a religious celebration but indulges in the celebration of his stomach.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

01 The Mishneh Torah teaches that celebration on Sukkot is incomplete if we only celebrate with those closest to us. What do you think this teaches about the relationship between joy and responsibility?

02 Why do you think Maimonides connects hospitality toward people experiencing hardship with truly observing the holiday?

03 Who are the people or communities that we might unintentionally leave outside our “courtyard” today?

Who do we welcome on Sukkot? *Ushpizin* and *Hachnasat Orchim*, Rabbi Rebecca Kaufman

Rabbi Kaufman is the Associate Rabbi at Congregation Beth Chaim in New Jersey. Rabbi Kaufman earned an AB from Princeton University. She received her Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, where she was ordained in 2023.

There are seven days of Sukkot and each day traditionally corresponds to a different guest visiting the *sukkah*. Each guest also has a theme or trait associated with them. The seven guests listed in the Zohar (foundational text of Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism , 13th c.) are all men from Jewish tradition, but many practices today include ushpizot (the female plural or *ushpizin*) and include women along with these male guests. The women ushpizot correspond to the seven women prophetesses named in the Talmud. Another important aspect of the tradition is that the *ushpizin* guests represent a different characteristic of God (also known as a sefirah)

FIRST DAY	**Abraham / Sarah** חסד *chesed* "loving-kindness"
SECOND DAY	**Isaac / Miriam** גבורה gevurah "restraint, personal strength, firmness"
THIRD DAY	**Jacob / Deborah** תפארת tiferet "splendor," beauty, balance'
FOURTH DAY	**Moses / Hannah** נצח netzach "eternity, prophecy"
FIFTH DAY	**Aaron / Abigail** הוד hod "glory," empathy, receptivity to divine splendor, prayerfulness
SIXTH DAY	**Joseph / Hulda** יסוד yesod "spiritual foundation, creativity, righteousness"
SEVENTH DAY	**David / Esther** מלכות malchut "sovereignty/royalty, presence, receptivity"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

01 Sukkot asks us to welcome ancestors, strangers, and people we have not yet met. What does this teach us about the communities we are responsible for building?

02 Each *ushpiz* (guest) represents a different value or characteristic. Which quality feels most needed in your community right now?

03 If today's service project were an invitation into your *sukkah*, who would you hope feels seen, welcomed, and valued through your actions?

VALUES TENSION

Tradition and Renewal

Service-learning lives at the intersection of tradition and renewal. Jewish tradition connects us to generations before us through rituals, stories, and values that have shaped Jewish life for thousands of years. It offers wisdom, grounding, and a sense of belonging. Renewal asks us how those same values come alive in the world we live in today. Each generation is called not only to inherit our tradition, but to apply it in response to new realities, challenges, and opportunities.

Service-learning brings these two together. It draws on Jewish wisdom while inviting us to meet today's needs with compassion, creativity, and action. By serving our communities, we honor what we've inherited and discover new ways to live our values.

01 The tradition of *ushpizin* has changed over time, expanding who is welcomed into the *sukkah*. What does this teach us about how traditions grow and evolve?

02 How can we honor the wisdom and experiences of those who came before us while making space for new voices and perspectives?

03 As you serve today, how are you helping build a community that is both rooted in tradition and open to renewal?

Service Project Ideas

Below are sample service project ideas organized by issue area. Each includes examples of how the project can connect to the themes of Sukkot, along with a few project ideas to bring those themes to life.

HOUSING

Sukkot asks us to leave our permanent homes and dwell in fragile, temporary structures, a practice that can deepen our care for those without stable shelter at all. The *sukkah*'s open roof and unstable walls are a reminder of what precarious housing feels like. Celebrating a holiday of impermanent housing is a natural moment to volunteer directly with a shelter or housing program.

PROJECTS

- Volunteer at shelters, transitional housing, or supportive housing programs (start an art program, a gardening initiative, etc.)
- Make no-sew blankets for a local shelter or outreach organization to distribute this winter
- Help paint, landscape, or repair spaces for residents alongside a housing nonprofit or community development organization

HUNGER

Sukkot is a harvest festival of gratitude, and the tradition builds in practices like leket and peah, leaving gleanings in the field for those without enough. *Ushpizin*, the custom of inviting guests into the *sukkah*, models the kind of open-handed hospitality that a simple shared meal embodies. Gratitude for a full harvest is meant to expand outward; an invitation to cook for, serve, or share a table with someone who needs it.

PROJECTS

- Participate in a food rescue operation
- Volunteer at, or start, a community garden that donates produce to local food access programs
- Partner with a local service organization to prepare and share a meal

ENVIRONMENTALISM

Sukkot is deeply agricultural, tied to harvest cycles and the rhythms of weather and season. Living in the *sukkah* for a week roots us in the natural world rather than shielding us from it, making this a fitting time to tend a garden, clean up a green space, or otherwise care for the land with our own hands. The holiday's attentiveness to rain and harvest keeps us close to the earth that sustains us.

PROJECTS

- Volunteer at a community garden that grows food for neighbors experiencing food insecurity
- Start a rain and water conservation project
- Clean up a public space with a local environmental or neighborhood organization

Reflection

In Jewish tradition, it is customary to offer gratitude to those from whom we've learned. It comes from Pirkei Avot, the Teachings of Our Ancestors, where it's written that repeating a learning and crediting the person who taught it to you "brings redemption into the world." Today, we're going to borrow from this practice to show gratitude to the people we learned something from today, and to the people who caused us to think about something from a different perspective.

Describe a snapshot of a lesson you are taking from the day. Who taught you these lessons? What exactly did you learn from them?

By reflecting on what we've learned today and crediting the person who we learned from, we can engage in the practice of sharing a learning in the name of the person who taught it to us. Now, let's actually thank the person who taught us something. You can:

- Write a short note of gratitude to the person who taught you something significant.
- Send texts to those you want to thank.
- Or simply walk up to the person you want to show gratitude to and thank them personally.