



WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Names of the Week

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The holiday of Sukkot has several names. Let's take a look at them:

Chag HaSukkot

One name of Sukkot, of course, is **חג הסוכות**. “On the 15th day of this seventh month there shall be the Feast of Booths (Sukkot) to Hashem, [to last] seven days. [...] You shall live in booths (*sukkot*) for seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in booths, in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; I Hashem your G-d” (Vayikra 23:34, 42–43).

While the word *sukkot* in Tanach often refers to the holiday, there are also examples of *sukkot* referring to commonplace booths. Those booths were used for shade, either for workers in a field or for livestock. The shade provided by these booths is the root of the word *sukkah*. “*Sukkah*” derives from the root **כִּבֵּה**, “to cover,” which also provides us with the word we use to describe the covering of the *sukkah*: **כִּבֵּה**. This same root is the foundation for other words involving covering:

- **מִוֶּטֶה** – In its only occurrence in the Bible (Melachim II 16:18), this meant a covered portico; today it means “a garage”.
- **מָסָךְ** – Originally a curtain or screen; today it often refers to a computer monitor or the screen of a phone.
- **מַסְכָּה** – A covering; today it means “mask” (influenced by the English word).

Chag HaAsif

In the Torah, Sukkot is also referred to as “*Chag HaAsif*” (Shemot 23:16 and 34:22). Often translated as the “Harvest Festival,” a more precise translation



would be the “Festival of Ingathering,” since the crops are gathered in from the field at harvest time, as is mentioned in Vayikra 23:39: “Mark, on the 15th day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the yield of your land.”

The root **קָצַף** means “to gather, to collect, to assemble.” Other related words are **אַסְפָּה** – “assembly,” **קָצַף** – “compilation” and **קָצַף** – “collection.”

There is some disagreement over which other roots may be related to **קָצַף**, and this debate helps us understand the original meaning of **קָצַף** as well. Some say it is related to the root **קָצַף** – “to add, increase.” This latter root is found in words related to increasing, such as **מוֹסִיף**, **נוֹסֵף**, **מוֹסֵף**. As one collects and gathers, one’s possessions increase.

Others say **קָצַף** is related to the root **קָצַף**, meaning “to end,” since gathering in items (such as the grains from a harvest), puts them in a closed, limited area. This is seen in another meaning of **קָצַף** – “he took away, withdrew.”

Both meanings are found in the name given to Yosef by Rachel: “She conceived and bore a son, and said, ‘G-d has taken away (**קָצַף**) my disgrace.’ So she named him Yosef, which is to say,

‘May Hashem add (**קָצַף**) another son for me’” (Bereishit 30:23–24).

Chag

In Yechezkel 45:23, Sukkot is not referred to by name, but simply called **חַג**. This name is found frequently in rabbinic literature, so any mention of just “*chag*” will indicate Sukkot. Of course, with the addition of the specific *chag* it could be referring to any of the three pilgrimage festivals. The notion of pilgrimage is reflected in its root: **חָגַג** – “to make a pilgrimage, to celebrate a feast.”

The root **חָגַג** can also mean “to dance” and is related to the root **חָגַג** – “to make or move in a circle.” Although today it is an anachronism, the “dialing” of phones in Hebrew is called **חָגַג**, and an area code is an **חָגַג**. From the notion of a “circle of people,” we get the word **חָגַג**, meaning “club” or “class.”

Z’man Simchateinu

As seen above, Sukkot was the most prominent of the agricultural holidays. This is due to the end of the harvest season, a time of great joy. That feeling is reflected in the name **זְמַן שִׂמְחָתֵנוּ**, which appears in our prayers. The root **שִׂמַּח** is connected to the root **צָמַח** – “to sprout.” A similar case is found in English, in which the word “elated” means both “happy” and “lifted up.” Another meaning of **שִׂמַּח** is “to glow” which is why it is often found together in with the word for light, as in **אוֹרָה** **וְשִׂמְחָה**.

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