the holiday of Sukkot has several names. Let’s take a look at them:

**Chag HaSukkot**

One name of Sukkot, of course, is חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת, “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 23:34–43).

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 שַׁכָּה, “to cover,” which also provides us with the word we use to describe the covering of the *sukkah*: שַׁכָּה. This same root is the foundation for other words involving covering:

- שַׁכָּה – In its only occurrence in the Bible (Melachim II 16:18), this meant a covered portico; today it means “a garage”.
- שַׁכָּה – Originally a curtain or screen; today it often refers to a computer monitor or the screen of a phone.
- שַׁכָּה – 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 שלּוּט means “to gather, to collect, to assemble.” Other related words are לְעַסֵּף – “assembly,” לְאָסָף – “compilation” and לְסֵפֶת – “collection.”

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

Others say לְעַסֵּף is related to the root לְעַמָּה, 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 לְעַמָּה – “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 (לְעַמָּה) my disgrace.’ So she named him Yosef, which is to say, ‘May Hashem add (לְעַסֵּף) another son for me’” (Bereishit 30:23–24).

**Chag**

In Yechezkel 45:23, Sukkot is not referred to by name, but simply called שָׂמֵחַ. 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: גָּאָה – “to make a pilgrimage, to celebrate a feast.”

The root שָׂמֵחַ can also mean “to dance” and is related to the root שנה – “to make or move in a circle.” Although today it is an anachronism, the “dialing” of phones in Hebrew is called שנה, and an area code is anニיַשְׂמָא ‘shomayim.’

From the notion of a “circle of people,” we get the word שָׂמֵחַ, 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 שִׂמְחָה is connected to the root שָׂמֵחַ – “to sprout.” A similar case is found in English, in which the word “elated” means both “happy” and “lifted up.” Another meaning of שִׂמְחָה is “to glow” which is why it is often found together with the word for light, as in אור שִׂמְחָה.

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