

**Hag Sameach and Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold**

Candle Lighting Time
Fri. Evening 6:48 pm
Sat. Evening 7:39 pm (from pre-existing flame)

Shmini Atzeret – Simchat Torah Service Schedule
Sat. Oct. 3 9:30 am Shmini Atzeret, Read Ecclesiastes, Yizkor
6 pm Mincha, Simchat Torah Celebration
Sun. Oct. 4 9:30 am, Simchat Torah Celebration Hatan Torah Michael
Kampton, Kallat Bereishit Temmy Kasdan

Once again, we approach the end of the Sukkot festival with sadness and hope. The horrible terrorist attack of Oct. 7 took place on Shmini Atzeret – Simchat Torah. Nonetheless, we are commanded to be joyous as we dance with the Torahs. We must constantly walk that path between sadness and joy. Here is a link for my High Holiday sermons this year. [High Holiday Sermons](#)

**END OF SUKKOT
BEATING THE WILLOWS**

“On the first day you shall take the product of a goodly trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days.” (Leviticus 23:40)

There is a tradition in Judaism that is unknown to most Jews, unless they grew up in a very Orthodox home. Nonetheless, I have always looked forward to this ritual. It takes place on Hoshana Raba, the seventh day of Sukkot, when we beat the willow branches.

Let me give this some context. The festival of Sukkot is seven days long. (Two days, Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are placed at the end. In Israel there is only one day at the end.) Each of those seven days except the Sabbath, we take the four species and wave them in every direction. The four species are a goodly fruit called an etrog, palm branches called a lulav, myrtle branches, and willow branches. We also march around the synagogue with them each day (except the Sabbath) praying to God, *hoshana* “save us.” (On the Sabbath we say the prayer without marching.) For six days we march around once. But on the seventh day, Hoshana Raba (literally the great *hoshana*), we march around seven times.

To anyone who knows their Bible, this pattern should be familiar. To

quote the old hymn, "Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, and the walls came tumbling down." For six days the Israelites marched around the fortified city of Jericho one time each day. On the seventh day they marched seven times around, blew the trumpets, and the city fell. God's saving power reflects these events in ancient Israel.

In Jewish tradition, there is a special message on this seventh day of Sukkot. On Rosh Hashana our fates have been written in the Book of Life, and on Yom Kippur they have been sealed. But according to Jewish tradition, Hoshana Raba serves as a kind of appeal process, one more chance to get those prayers in. We often break into High Holiday mode as we chant our prayers that day.

That brings me to the willows. After marching around seven times, we take five willow branches and beat them on the ground. We cry out *kol mevaser mevaser v'omer*, "a voice cries out, cries out and answers." Leaves fall off the willow branches looking like tears. God has answered our final prayers. Yes, a synagogue floor covered with willow leaves is a bit of a mess to clean up. But there is something powerful in the tangible action of banging those willow branches on the ground. It is one of the most physical moments in Judaism.

What does it symbolize? The four species symbolize four kinds of people. The etrog has taste and smell, symbolizing learning and good deeds. The dates from the palm tree have taste but no smell, symbolizing learning but no good deeds. The myrtle branches have smell but not taste, symbolizing good deeds but no learning. And finally, the poor willow branch has neither taste nor smell, symbolizing simple people with neither learning nor good deeds. Yet, it is these simple people who become the means to our salvation. Ultimately, God saves us not because of the works of scholars and saints, but the works of the most common people. We are saved by the most common people.

Even if you do not go to synagogue on Friday, find some willow branches, bang them on the floor, watch the leaves drop, and pray *hoshana* "save us." It is a small catharsis in the midst of a busy festival.