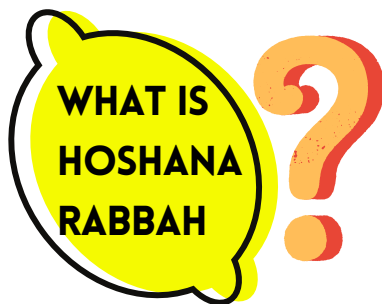


HOSHANA RABBAH

THE BIG IDEA

DURING HOSHANA RABBAH WE USE:

1. A kittel for the prayer leader (white robe also used during the High Holidays)
2. Tallit/Tefillin (take off halfway through)
3. Lulav/etrog
4. All of the Torahs in the ark
5. Willow branches
6. A blend of all the nusach (liturgical melodies) used throughout the year i.e. High Holiday, Festival, weekday, and Shabbat



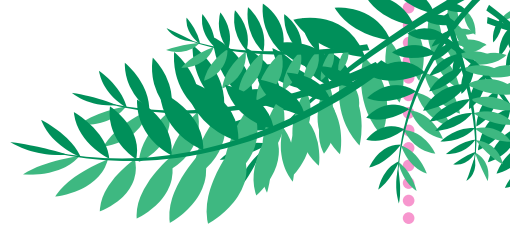
Hoshana Rabbah is the **seventh day of Sukkot** and is considered the final day of the divine judgment in which the fate of the new year is determined. It is the day when the verdict that was issued on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* is finalized. *Hoshana Rabbah* was viewed by the rabbis of the *Talmud* as a mini-*Yom Kippur*, a day on which the entire Jewish community is judged by God to be worthy or not of the seasonal rains. All seven *Hoshanot* prayers are recited in seven *hakafot*, or processions, around the sanctuary carrying the *lulav* and *etrog*. In many ways it is a highlight reel for the entire month of *Tishrei* holidays.

At the conclusion of the seven processions, a special ritual is conducted in which the branches of the willow (the *aravot*) are struck upon the ground. This is a symbolic attempt to rid ourselves of any remaining sins (the leaves representing these transgressions) that might influence the Divine decision to send the seasonal rains.

Since *Hoshana Rabbah* blends elements of the High Holy Days, *Chol HaMoed*, and *Yom Tov*, in the Ashkenazic tradition, the cantor recites the service using High Holiday, Festival, Weekday, and *Shabbat* melodies interchangeably.

On the evening following *Hoshana Rabbah*, the festival of *Shemini Atzeret* begins. While for many Jewish *Hoshana Rabbah* is the last day for shaking the *lulav/etrog* and dwelling in the *sukkah*, some Jewish continue to dwell in the *sukkah* through *Shemini Atzeret* without the accompanying blessing. This day is significant because it's the final day we recite the penitential psalm, *Psalm 27 LeDavid*, found on page 40 of *Siddur Lev Shalem*. We have been saying this psalm since *Rosh Chodesh Elul*.

WHAT DO WE DO ON HOSHANA RABBAH?



"THE SEVEN CIRCUITS AND BEATING OF THE WILLOWS: THEN AND NOW"

In Temple times, every day of *Sukkot*, the altar of the *Beit haMikdash*/Holy Temple was circled once, to the sounds of supplications for divine assistance; on *Hoshana Rabbah*, the altar was circled seven times. Today, during the course of the *Hoshana Rabbah* morning services, all the Torah scrolls are taken out of the ark and the congregation then makes seven circuits (instead of the one circuit done on the other days of *Sukkot*) while reciting the *Hoshanot* prayers, with *lulav* and *etrog* in hand. At the conclusion of the *Hoshanot*, we take a bundle of five willows and with it we strike the ground five times.



ASKING FOR DIVINE HELP

With this ritual we bring the Divine presence into our synagogues so that we can make our request for rain and, more broadly, for survival.

Much of the liturgy for *Hoshana Rabbah* includes prayers for Divine assistance - "*hosha-na*" which literally means "save, please." We do a *Hoshanot* ceremony every day of *Sukkot*, but it is extended and expanded on the last day, *Hoshana Rabbah*. On *Hoshana Rabbah*, all of the *Sifrei Torah* are removed from the ark and are circled seven times. The seven *Hoshanot* each come with one of the acrostic prayers featuring the word "*hosha-na*" but the service does not end there. After making the seven circuits, a new set of *hosha-na* themed prayers begins. Each one rhetorically expands the key supplication of "save, please" by a notch - the desperation in the voice of the congregation is impossible to overlook.

Based on the biblical story of Jericho in the book of Joshua, some scholars notice the parallels between bringing down divine judgment on the city and the rituals on *Hoshana Rabbah*. The prayers and rituals serve as a kind of summoning of the Divine presence and Divine attention. With this ritual we bring the Divine presence into our synagogues so that we can make our request for rain and, more broadly, for survival.

As the new year begins we are afraid. We are afraid that we or our loved ones may become ill; we are afraid that we may lose our livelihoods; we are afraid of terrorism or war; we are afraid that our marriages may collapse or our children may take a bad path; we are afraid that we are not succeeding or that we are not worthy of succeeding. Thus, every year we take these fears, this nervous tension, and we act out in ritual form a way of communicating with the Divine. It is the culmination of the High Holiday season of hopes and dreams.