

The Holy Weekday

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · 2 October 2026

What Chol HaMoed Asks of Ordinary Time

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The name is a paradox. *Chol* means ordinary, weekday, unsanctified. *Moed* means appointed time, festival. Chol HaMoed is the weekday of the festival, or the festival of the weekday. All week much of Israel has woken into it: buses running, some offices open, families on trips, and sukkot on every balcony. This morning, Hoshana Rabbah, is the last of those mornings.

What kind of time is this?

Not Yom Tov, not a regular weekday

The Torah forbids *melechet avodah*, laborious work, on the first and eighth days. Rashi, on the verse about the eighth day, notes the question the Sages asked: might such work also be forbidden on the intermediate days? And he cites the answer of the Sifra: on the intermediate days such work is not forbidden in the same way (Rashi on Vayikra 23:36).

The halachah that grew from this is careful and detailed. Some work is permitted, especially work needed for the festival or to prevent loss; much ordinary work is set aside where possible. The rules themselves say something. These days are not Yom Tov, and they are not a regular weekday either. They live in between.

The warning about the festivals

Pirkei Avot records a hard sentence in the name of Rabbi Elazar of Modiin. Among those who lose their share in the world to come, he lists “one who despises the festivals.” The commentators explain that this includes one who treats Chol HaMoed as an ordinary weekday.

It is a striking choice. Of all the ways a person could slight a festival, the Mishnah seems to worry most about the quiet days, the ones that are easy to flatten. No one forgets the first night of Sukkot. It is the fourth morning that is at risk.

Why the in-between matters

The series of Sukkot essays I have been writing this season has a simple spine: after judgment comes dwelling. Yom Kippur seals; Sukkot teaches a judged people how to live. A dwelling is tested not on the day you move in but on the ordinary days after. The first night in the sukkah is a celebration. The fourth evening, after work, when it is chilly and the children are tired and no guests are coming, is when you find out whether it has become a home.

The Sages taught that we should dwell in the sukkah “as you dwell,” *teshvu ke’ein taduru*: eat there, learn there, talk there, rest there, the way you live in your house (Sukkah 28b). That is a Chol HaMoed instruction. On Yom Tov we are guests of the festival. On Chol HaMoed we are residents.

A few practices for the weekday of the festival

Wear something a little better than weekday clothes. The halachic tradition encourages it, and it reminds the body that this is still the chag.

Keep at least one meal a day in the sukkah with real attention: a blessing said slowly, a word of Torah, a question for the children.

Leave the work that can wait. Where work cannot wait, do it without letting it take over the day.

And notice the ordinary. The glass of tea under the schach, the neighbor waving from the next balcony, the sound of someone’s lulav being carried to shul. These are not interruptions of the festival. They are what the festival is for.

The hinge

The first day told us who we are. Today, Hoshana Rabbah, the last of them ends with the willows beaten on the ground, and tonight in Israel Shemini Atzeret begins and closes the season. In between were these days, the holy weekdays, in which a people practices living with holiness on an ordinary schedule. If the sukkah works on a weekday, it will work the rest of the year.

For the table

1. Chol HaMoed means “the weekday of the festival.”
2. The Mishnah warns us not to treat these days as ordinary.
3. On these days we live in the sukkah the way we live at home.

Sources

- Vayikra 23:36; Rashi there, citing the Sifra (work on the intermediate days)
- Pirkei Avot, Rabbi Elazar of Modiin (“one who despises the festivals”)
- Sukkah 28b (*teshvu ke’ein taduru*, dwell as you live)

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