1

00:00:00,080 --> 00:00:06,080

[Opening Titles]

2

00:00:23,700 --> 00:00:25,300

Shalom, I'm Yoel Finkelman,

3

00:00:25,320 --> 00:00:28,300

curator of the Judaica Collection

at the National Library of Israel.

4

00:00:28,700 --> 00:00:29,920

I'm Nechama Goldman Barash,

5

00:00:29,940 --> 00:00:34,400

senior faculty member at

the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem.

6

00:00:34,960 --> 00:00:39,320

Today we're going to be introducing

 the more celebratory holidays

7

00:00:39,320 --> 00:00:42,900

of the Jewish month of Tishrei,

the fall festivals.

8

00:00:43,120 --> 00:00:47,300

So Sukkot is really my favourite holiday of the year.

It's a very exciting time.

9

00:00:47,320 --> 00:00:51,040

This idea of even going out of the house,

into these little huts.

10

00:00:51,060 --> 00:00:56,240

that many people spend time decorating

with pictures, hanging fruit, sweet-smelling branches.

11

00:00:56,260 --> 00:01:00,400

And you sit around the table

and there's something a little picnicky about it.

12

00:01:00,420 --> 00:01:03,560

You sit around, you have delicious food

you invite over family and friends

13

00:01:03,580 --> 00:01:08,840

And it's really a sense of thanksgiving,

after the solemnity of the high holidays.

14

00:01:08,860 --> 00:01:11,040

It's definitely a change in atmosphere

15

00:01:11,060 --> 00:01:17,040

and if you walk around Jerusalem or neighbourhoods

in Israel or around the world,

16

00:01:17,060 --> 00:01:21,040

there's certainly a changed atmosphere,

people out in the streets,

17

00:01:21,060 --> 00:01:26,400

people building their Sukkot,

markets that are open to purchase the four species,

18

00:01:26,420 --> 00:01:32,280

with people carefully examining each one

to match the laws and find the most beautiful ones.

19

00:01:32,300 --> 00:01:33,960

And it's a change in atmosphere.

20

00:01:33,980 --> 00:01:38,880

Even though some of the themes of Sukkot,

of removal from your own secure home,

21

00:01:38,900 --> 00:01:40,160

into something less secure,

22

00:01:40,180 --> 00:01:45,600

learning to trust what God and nature give,

they have some weight to them

23

00:01:45,620 --> 00:01:49,080

but certainly, after the high holidays,

Rosh Ha-Shanah, Yom Kippur,

24

00:01:49,100 --> 00:01:52,800

there's a much lighter and

celebratory atmosphere.

25

00:01:52,820 --> 00:01:54,840

Even looking through the schach,

26

00:01:54,860 --> 00:01:58,000

the palm branches that make up

the roofs of these little booths

27

00:01:58,020 --> 00:02:03,400

and seeing the stars, seeing the sky,

does give a sense of the vastness of the universe

28

00:02:03,420 --> 00:02:08,040

and yet you're in your little secure bubble,

your own little secure space

29

00:02:08,060 --> 00:02:12,040

that is filled, hopefully, for all of us,

with people that we love and want to be with.

30

00:02:12,060 --> 00:02:15,080

So one of the things,

the way this gets expressed,

31

00:02:15,100 --> 00:02:22,600

is in a marvellous book that I like.

This is a 1601 printed edition from Venice.

32

00:02:22,620 --> 00:02:27,300

And it's printed in Yiddish.

One of the wonderful things print enabled

33

00:02:27,320 --> 00:02:31,700

was the possibility of a larger

and more diverse popular literature

34

00:02:31,720 --> 00:02:34,520

because texts became cheaper

once they became printed.

35

00:02:34,540 --> 00:02:36,880

And Yiddish, which was the vernacular,

36

00:02:36,900 --> 00:02:42,120

it was not the ivory tower rabbinic language

of Hebrew and Aramaic.

37

00:02:42,140 --> 00:02:46,320

This was the spoken language

explicitly for what are sometimes called

38

00:02:46,340 --> 00:02:48,960

women and the men

with the education of women.

39

00:02:48,980 --> 00:02:51,600

And here we have what's called a sefer ha-minhagim.

40

00:02:51,620 --> 00:02:56,280

a book of practices,

which goes through the annual cycle,

41

00:02:56,300 --> 00:02:59,320

and with wonderful little woodcuts

gives you an image.

42

00:02:59,340 --> 00:03:02,720

And here we have an image of

a woodcut of a family,

43

00:03:02,740 --> 00:03:07,560

ostensibly in the sukkah,

going out of their home

44

00:03:07,580 --> 00:03:12,320

and there are men and women

in fine Italian Renaissance dress.

45

00:03:12,340 --> 00:03:16,840

And this book continues

with wonderful woodcuts

46

00:03:16,860 --> 00:03:19,320

of other holidays that

we don't have time now to talk about,

47

00:03:19,340 --> 00:03:22,000

of Purim, the holiday of

the time of dressing up

48

00:03:22,020 --> 00:03:26,320

or the special prayers for the new moon,

49

00:03:26,340 --> 00:03:29,560

or the baking of matzah on Passover.

50

00:03:29,580 --> 00:03:35,360

But here, this idea of focusing,

in a very popular way

51

00:03:35,600 --> 00:03:41,480

on the practices of the Sukkot holiday

is really marvelous

52

00:03:41,500 --> 00:03:45,840

in this simple printed Yiddish book

for the less educated.

53

00:03:45,860 --> 00:03:50,640

And can I also assume, calling it sefer ha-minhagim,

the book of customs or practices,

54

00:03:50,660 --> 00:03:53,280

would be different in Germany

than, say, in Morocco.

55

00:03:53,300 --> 00:03:56,080

In other words, in terms of the blessings

they might have said

56

00:03:56,100 --> 00:03:58,080

or they foods they might have eaten,

and so on.

57

00:03:58,100 --> 00:04:01,280

That's what a custom is.

Certainly there were different traditions.

58

00:04:01,300 --> 00:04:04,560

But this is of course a Yiddish book,

reflecting the practices

59

00:04:04,580 --> 00:04:06,400

of the Yiddish-speaking community.

60

00:04:06,420 --> 00:04:09,840

And there was a tendency, with printing,

61

00:04:09,860 --> 00:04:14,120

to unify certain practices,

because they could be spread by print more easily.

62

00:04:14,140 --> 00:04:17,280

So I really love this image from the 19th century,

63

00:04:17,300 --> 00:04:19,700

where you see a family sitting around the sukkah.

64

00:04:19,720 --> 00:04:23,920

And you see the chains that today

people still make out of paper,

65

00:04:23,940 --> 00:04:25,960

out of fruit that they hang in their sukkah

66

00:04:25,980 --> 00:04:30,080

and you see the young woman bringing in

a steaming tureen of soup,

67

00:04:30,100 --> 00:04:32,760

because she has to go from the house

into the sukkah.

68

00:04:32,780 --> 00:04:35,680

So really this picture,

while it's somewhat old fashioned,

69

00:04:35,700 --> 00:04:39,000

is still very reflective

of the way Sukkot looks today,

70

00:04:39,020 --> 00:04:40,760

in many homes, in many communities.

71

00:04:40,780 --> 00:04:44,040

What I want to talk about, Yoel,

is the eighth day.

72

00:04:44,060 --> 00:04:49,360

We have a holiday that in the Torah,

in the Bible, is mentioned as the eighth day,

73

00:04:49,380 --> 00:04:52,480

coming at the tail end of the seventh day, thanksgiving

74

00:04:52,500 --> 00:04:57,280

holiday of booths festival, and

it's really meant to be distinct and on its own.

75

00:04:57,300 --> 00:05:02,080

But its entire character is made up of bringing specific sacrifices to the Temple.

76

00:05:02,080 --> 00:05:09,080

Post temple, and around several hundred years

after the temple is destroyed in 70 CE

77

00:05:09,100 --> 00:05:15,040

the question of what to do with this eighth day,

besides saying special prayers, arises.

78

00:05:15,040 --> 00:05:21,080

And it turns into a celebration of

the completion of the cycle of reading Torah,

79

00:05:21,100 --> 00:05:26,200

which became a fixed cycle, so that every year

we go through the five books of Moses

80

00:05:26,220 --> 00:05:31,280

reading one portion a week,

to get us in the fifty-second week,

81

00:05:31,300 --> 00:05:33,000

back essentially to the beginning.

82

00:05:33,000 --> 00:05:36,200

And so Simchat Torah, the joy of the Torah,

83

00:05:36,220 --> 00:05:41,240

becomes the character of

this holiday of the eighth day

84

00:05:41,260 --> 00:05:44,700

and that's where you begin to see

almost ecstatic celebration.

85

00:05:44,740 --> 00:05:48,000

We've talked about solemnity,

on Rosh-HaShana and Yom Kippur

86

00:05:48,020 --> 00:05:51,080

and then joyfulness and

thanksgiving on Sukkot

87

00:05:51,100 --> 00:05:56,280

and it kind of culminates in, I would say,

an almost carnivalesque atmosphere.

88

00:05:56,300 --> 00:06:00,000

There's drinking, children are

running around the synagogue,

89

00:06:00,020 --> 00:06:03,880

almost unchecked, there's more talking

and ecstatic dancing

90

00:06:03,900 --> 00:06:08,000

and sometimes eating in places that

we don't normally eat, and certainly drinking

91

00:06:08,000 --> 00:06:13,400

and flag waving, and really,

this takes on a totally distinct character,

92

00:06:13,400 --> 00:06:15,400

different than everything that came before.

93

00:06:15,420 --> 00:06:18,400

Yes, and you get special prayers,

94

00:06:18,420 --> 00:06:21,500

that involve the celebration of the Torah

95

00:06:21,520 --> 00:06:25,080

the removal of all of the Torah scrolls

96

00:06:25,100 --> 00:06:28,800

from the ark and dancing with them

throughout the synagogue.

97

00:06:28,820 --> 00:06:32,840

You mentioned the place of women increasingly in recent years.

98

00:06:32,840 --> 00:06:38,520

There's been more and more place for

gender equality in these celebrations,

99

00:06:38,520 --> 00:06:40,280

at least in some communities.

100

00:06:40,300 --> 00:06:43,280

And here we see

a very simple manuscript on paper.

101

00:06:43,300 --> 00:06:47,600

But there was a choice,

by somebody, in roughly 1790

102

00:06:47,600 --> 00:06:50,320

who loved this holiday enough

103

00:06:50,340 --> 00:06:56,800

to commission a calligraphic set

of the special prayers for Simchat Torah.

104

00:06:56,820 --> 00:07:01,000

Here we have a carefully written cover page

105

00:07:01,000 --> 00:07:07,000

and then Sisu v’gilu b’simchat Torah, celebrate and rejoice

the holiday of Simchat Torah.

106

00:07:07,000 --> 00:07:08,080

The reinforcement, not just of happiness,

107

00:07:08,120 --> 00:07:12,440

of joyousness, but [Hebrew],

like rejoice and rejoice even more.

108

00:07:12,460 --> 00:07:16,240

And that leads to, as we said,

this kind of almost circular motion

109

00:07:16,260 --> 00:07:18,560

of frenzy, of dancing with all the Torahs,

110

00:07:18,580 --> 00:07:23,000

of circling the tables in the synagogue.

111

00:07:23,020 --> 00:07:27,440

Like really a sense of absolute joyfulness.

112

00:07:27,460 --> 00:07:31,500

So you mentioned, in passing, flags.

And one of the traditions of the modern period

113

00:07:31,520 --> 00:07:36,280

is to give children flags

and they will participate in the dancing,

114

00:07:36,300 --> 00:07:38,640

carrying specially-made flags.

115

00:07:38,660 --> 00:07:43,640

And we have here two from the collection.

116

00:07:43,660 --> 00:07:48,000

This is from Warsaw and Vilnius

117

00:07:48,020 --> 00:07:53,800

This is an East European flag,

in the Zionist tradition, the early Zionist tradition.

118

00:07:53,800 --> 00:07:57,480

We see the figure along with Moses and Aaron from the Bible,

119

00:07:57,500 --> 00:07:59,320

but also of Theodor Hertzl.

120

00:07:59,340 --> 00:08:05,080

And on the other side, the image of

the other Zionist leader, Max Nordau.

121

00:08:05,100 --> 00:08:07,680

And some of the prayers, upon which

122

00:08:07,700 --> 00:08:13,040

taking the Torahs out of the ark,

are sung and celebrated and danced.

123

00:08:13,060 --> 00:08:15,180

And also, look,

there's the lion and the gazelle,

124

00:08:15,200 --> 00:08:18,400

and you'll find that on a lot of flags today

that are given to children,

125

00:08:18,400 --> 00:08:20,760

those symbols very prominently displayed.

126

00:08:20,780 --> 00:08:26,360

And the question of the symbols on the flags

become super important.

127

00:08:26,380 --> 00:08:29,920

And here we have another from the flag collection,

a more contemporary one,

128

00:08:29,920 --> 00:08:34,120

from the Reform Jewish community of Israel,

129

00:08:34,140 --> 00:08:40,500

which shows men and women of different ethnicities

within the Jewish community

130

00:08:40,520 --> 00:08:43,360

celebrating Simchat Torah with the Torah scrolls.

131

00:08:43,360 --> 00:08:48,680

And with the flags as kind of cartoon drawings

132

00:08:48,680 --> 00:08:52,520

that show out in the fields,

and not only in the synagogues,

133

00:08:52,540 --> 00:08:55,760

the landscape of the Land of Israel.

134

00:08:55,760 --> 00:08:59,740

So what we see here, Yoel,

is something you already mentioned earlier.

135

00:08:59,760 --> 00:09:02,240

We see girls dancing with the Torah.

136

00:09:02,260 --> 00:09:05,520

And that really is of course

a reflection of modernity,

137

00:09:05,540 --> 00:09:07,250

of the last hundred years,

138

00:09:07,270 --> 00:09:11,560

in which women are looking for

more active participation in synagogue.

139

00:09:11,580 --> 00:09:15,720

where they were often behind

the mehitzah, or the divider,

140

00:09:15,720 --> 00:09:17,400

very passively watching.

141

00:09:17,420 --> 00:09:21,880

And in most communities,

in many Jewish communities around the world,

142

00:09:21,900 --> 00:09:23,380

women are given more active roles

143

00:09:23,520 --> 00:09:26,400

and in many cases are given

the Torah with which to dance.

144

00:09:26,400 --> 00:09:29,640

I think what we've seen here,

as we come to the end,

145

00:09:29,660 --> 00:09:33,800

is really a holiday

that, beyond the liturgy,

146

00:09:33,900 --> 00:09:36,920

has many rituals

that make it very, very dear.

147

00:09:36,940 --> 00:09:39,840

And I'm talking about

Sukkot and Simchat Torah

148

00:09:39,860 --> 00:09:43,360

which are not just inside the synagogue praying

149

00:09:43,380 --> 00:09:47,320

but very much going

outside of the synagogue, outside of the homes,

150

00:09:47,340 --> 00:09:52,680

into these very special spaces that remind us both of our vulnerability

151

00:09:52,680 --> 00:09:55,280

but also our thanksgiving, our gratitude

152

00:09:55,300 --> 00:09:58,800

for where we are

at the end of this period of time.

153

00:09:58,820 --> 00:10:02,840

And then morphing into

this ecstatic celebration

154

00:10:02,860 --> 00:10:08,680

of our identity as a people

who still care about and learn and study

155

00:10:08,700 --> 00:10:11,880

this ancient text of ours, Torah.

156

00:10:11,880 --> 00:10:16,120

And that, I think,

is a kind of perfect ending

157

00:10:16,120 --> 00:10:19,440

for what amounts to

a very long and intense month

158

00:10:19,460 --> 00:10:24,000

of different kinds of celebrations

with all kinds of emotions and experiences

159

00:10:24,020 --> 00:10:27,680

and peaks with that

kind of ecstatic celebration.

160

00:10:27,700 --> 00:10:30,250

Nechama, thanks for

coming to the National Library

161

00:10:30,270 --> 00:10:34,920

and giving us an excuse to discuss

the holidays of Sukkot and Simchat Torah

162

00:10:35,000 --> 00:10:39,200

and some of the items from our collection

that reflect those celebrations.

163

00:10:39,220 --> 00:10:41,600

Thanks a lot. Thank you.

Thank you for listening.