

## DAILY LIVING

## Having Chol HaMoed Fun: Together

Oh, *Chol HaMoed*, how I love thee. *Chol HaMoed* is the perfect blend of an actual *chag* and days off: you're on vacation, no need to rush out to school or work and yet, no one is expecting you to mow the lawn or do the laundry. And *Chol HaMoed Sukkot* is the best of both worlds because there's no need to pack the car with a plastic shopping bag full of hard-boiled eggs and jellied fruit like some might do on *that other Chol HaMoed* that shall remain nameless.

Over the years, our family has gone apple picking (or pumpkin picking, depending on how late in the season the *chag* falls out) or we might have taken a drive to Amish Country or the Catskills for the day. But then there was the year that everyone was sick with the (so gross) cockasakie virus, also known as hand-foot-and-mouth disease. If you've had this in your house, I'm willing to bet you just involuntarily shuddered. And if you haven't, I pray that you never do. But you might want to go wash your hands now, anyway. Actually, it would be a good idea if we all went and washed our hands. I will. Go ahead, I'll meet you back here.

The year that hand-foot-and-mouth invaded our home, we had a six-week-old baby who was the first to come down with it – on Yom Kippur morning. There's nothing quite like walking to the doctor's office, while fasting, with a newborn who has a fever.

The virus quickly spread to include all the kids plus my husband and, by the first day of *Sukkot*, we were all down for the count. Needless to say, we did not go farther than the backyard that *Chol HaMoed*.

So just in case you're stuck in the house this *Chol HaMoed* – because there's a new baby or because someone has a cold – not because of anything worse, here are six

ideas for family fun at home.

(And I'm going to go out on a limb and guess that if you have (pre)teenagers at home, they're likely hanging out with their friends. These suggestions are for the mid-elementary school age and younger.)

1. Melt Lots of Chocolate. It's yummy



and you can be productive by making a *Simchat Torah* dessert at the same time. Years ago, I picked up a few Torah-shaped and star-shaped chocolate molds somewhere in Flatbush and we've been using them ever since.

Big kids and little kids alike can help make the candy – older kids can melt the chocolate in the microwave (on high for 30 seconds and then stir the chocolate, repeat until melted) while younger kids can put the lollipop sticks into the mold and help fill the molds with chocolate. Let

the chocolate harden in the molds, pop out the lollipops and then make some more. Be sure to make enough lollipops so everyone can have a taste before *Simchat Torah*.



2. Play in the *Sukkah*. Hang out in the *sukkah*, drink hot chocolate and play popcorn tic-tac-toe. *Popcorn tic-tac-toe*? It's exactly what it sounds like – draw a tic-tac-toe board on a sheet of paper. One person uses popcorn as his or her game pieces; the other player uses unpopped kernels. The winner gets to eat the popcorn. But wait, before you start playing, use some of the leftover chocolate

from the lollipop-making session and whip up some hot chocolate spoons. To make, dip the tops of plastic spoons into melted chocolate and immediately dip the chocolate covered spoon into any (or all!) of these toppings: sprinkles, chopped nuts, M&M's, crushed cookies or really, whatever you have in the house. Use these spoons to mix your hot chocolate and, oh my goodness, these are so good as they melt inside your mug of yumminess.

3. Go for a Family Bike Ride. When was the last time you dusted off all the bikes and helmets and kneepads? Just because you're not going on a day-long outing doesn't mean you can't actually leave the house. You can even stop for ice cream on the way back! Or, if you don't want to venture that



far, let the kids ride their bikes through the many thousands of leaves that are very likely not raked as of yet in your backyard. You might get lucky and the leaves might all land in a nice and neat pile as the kids fly around the yard.

4. Play Bingo in the *Sukkah*. Visit <http://www.dltk-cards.com/bingo/> and check out their customizable bingo cards. The cards can be printed for free; everyone loves bingo and chocolate chips make the best bingo chips.

5. Make Stuffed Cabbage. *What?* I'll explain. To start, my grandmother always made stuffed cabbage for the second days of *Sukkot*, so now we do too. And second, it's a very long activity and even little kids can get the hang of it. My kids have been helping me make it for years and it's something they always look forward to. In our house, it kind of goes together with decorating the *sukkah*, as in "Is it decorate the *sukkah* and make stuffed cabbage day yet?" It's

fun, it's mindless which is perfect because you don't have to think – and it's delicious. An excellent recipe for stuffed cabbage can be found in the *Spice and Spirit* cookbook.



6. Take a Bath. Not you. Although, you definitely deserve one. Maybe, after the kids are asleep, you can pick up the book you've been reading for the last six months – one page a night before passing out – and actually read a few pages before you fall asleep in a hot bath. Maybe. But right now, the kids are filthy so let's focus.

Once you're all done melting chocolate, playing in the *sukkah* and stuffing cabbage rolls, it's likely that the family might be a little dirty. Don't just give the kids a regular bath; give them a glow in the dark bath. Drop glow sticks (any party store should have them) into the bath, plopping the kids into the water and shut the bathroom lights – instant fun while getting clean. Multi-tasking is the best. Just, please, stay next to your kids in the tub; staying safe is always the most fun.

There's really nothing wrong with staying home on *Chol HaMoed* – you don't even need to have a reason. The goal of a day trip is to have fun as a family, but sometimes a day long trip can seem very overwhelming. Staying home and doing low-key activities fills the need just as well as a big adventure – and that's being together as a family and having fun – *together*.

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