'Readings'

First day of Sukkot

KOHELET is read on Shabbat Yom Tov Sukkot. It is read before the reading of the Torah. When Kohelet is read from a parchment megila (common in J'lem), brachot are recited on the reading. No brachot are said if it is read from a printed book.

The megila, written by Shlomo HaMelech in his later years, takes a serious look at the Life we all live, and his conclusions boil down to there being nothing of real value in this World - **Except to be G-d-fearing**. Kohelet provides a sobering balance to potentially inappropriate levity of the Chag and hopefully focuses our joy in the proper direction.

Two Torahs...

In the first Torah we read from Parshat Emor, Vayikra 23, the portion of the Festivals - seven aliyot - for Shabbat.

We actually start the reading several p'sukim earlier with the mitzvot of not taking an animal from its mother to use it as a korban before it is 8 days old. And the prohibition of slaughtering an animal and its offspring on the same day. This second mitzva applies to korbanot and to "personal" use of animals for food. The first mitzva is specifically for korbanot (but its spirit applies to "regular" animals too).

Next the Torah teaches us the mitzvot of Kiddush HaShem and its opposite.

Perhaps we can understand why Chazal "backed us up" these 8 p'sukim, rather than leaving us just with the portion of the cycle of the Chagim. First of all, on Chag there are many animals used both for Korbanot and for the dinner table. The two mitzvot included in this opening portion of the Torah reading serve as a reminder that we have rules and regulations that go along with our commandments and permission to use the animals for our own purposes. The "reminder" of Kiddush HaShem & Chilul HaShem, serves us well to focus our SIMCHA in the proper direction and not allow ourselves to get carried away by improper joyful behavior.

The final pasuk before the presentation of the Chagim reminds us that all the Holidays are commemorative of the Exodus from Egypt. Now, we are ready to continue with the reading about the Holidays themselves.

The Torah begins with Shabbat, followed by Pesach, the Omer, Shavuot, Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. This 52-pasuk portion is read for 7 people, the number of Aliyot assigned to Shabbat.

The straightforward (P'SHAT) reading of the presentation of the cycle of the Holidays is that it begins with Shabbat. We acknowledge this in the regular Friday night Kiddush when we refer to Shabbat as RISHON HU L'MIKRA'EI KODESH, the first of the days called Sacred, meaning the days whose sanctity is accompanied by a prohibition of Melacha.

Towards Better Davening & Torah Reading

Concerning the phrase L'MIKRA'EI KODESH, because KO-desh is accented MIL-EIL (on the next-to-last syllable), we would expect the accent of L'MIKRA'EI to migrate back and the word to also be MIL-EIL - l'mik-RA-ei. This is the expected NASOG ACHOR situation. But that doesn't happen here - I don't know why - and the phrase is l'mik-ra-EI KO-desh. It does not flow easily, but that is the way it is accented.

There is another way of understanding the opening p'sukim of PARSHAT HAMO'ADIM, portion of the festivals. (attributed to the GR"A).

Speak to the people of Israel... these are My Holidays (which will be detailed shortly). On six of them, there are some Melachot that may be done, but on the seventh of the Holidays, no manner of Melacha is permitted, it is a SHABBAT SHABBATON. Rosh HaShana, first day of Sukkot, Shmini Atzeret, 1st and 7th day of Pesach, and Shavuot are the 6 holy days on which some Melacha is permitted. But on Yom Kippur... no melacha at all, it is Shabbat Shabbaton...

Maftir is read from a second Torah, from Bamidbar 29:12-16, Parshat Pinchas. It is a 5-pasuk presentation of the Korban Musaf of the first day of Sukkot.

Haftara of the first day of Sukkot comes from Zecharya and contains the famous prophecy of the time in the future when other nations will recognize the One G-d and those nations that persecuted Israel will be severely punished. There is a universal message of Sukkot in that people from other nations will also be challenged with the mitzva of Sukka. The universal nature of Sukkot can also be seen by the 70 bulls of the Musafs of the seven days, which correspond to the 70 nations of the ancient world (that descend from No'ach). So too, the fact that the world is judged for rainfall on Sukkot gives the holiday a universal flavor, since rain is not just for the Jewish people.

Mincha on Shabbat - Yom Tov

we read the first part of the upcoming regularly scheduled sedra - V'ZOT HABRACHA.

Chol HaMoed Torah reading

Sunday (day 2 of Sukkot)

Monday (day 3)

Tuesday (day 4)

Wednesday (day 5)

Thursday (day 6), and

Friday (day 7, Hoshana Rabba)

all have the same Torah reading format (not the same p'sukim).

One Torah is taken out (as opposed to Chol HaMoed Pesach when two Torahs are used each day).

Four people are called to the Torah and the same set of p'sukim is read for each of the Aliyot. Each Aliya consists of three p'sukim, comes from Parshat Pinchas, and deals with the Musaf offering of each day.

(In Chutz LaAretz, the Chol HaMoed reading is a bit different, reflecting the concept of S'FEIKA D'YOMA, doubt as to the actual date of a given day...)

There is no haftara on Chol HaMoed (except on Shabbat). Our Sages did not want to burden the people who had to work (hopefully in a permitted way) during Chol HaMoed with extra shul-time.

Simchat Torah

The Torah's name for the 8th day of Sukkot which is really its own separate Holiday, is SHMINI ATZERET. That's what we call it in the Amida and in Yaaleh V'yavo. In Chutz LaAretz where two days are observed, the second day of Shmini Atzeret took on the name of Simchat Torah. Both days are called Shmini Atzeret in Kiddush & davening. In Israel where only one day of Yom Tov is observed, the one day carries both names, but in Kiddush and davening it is always called only Shmini Atzeret.

On the night of Simchat Torah, after HAKAFOT (separate link), we read the beginning of VZOT HABRACHA. Some call three people, some call five. This is the only night of the year that we read from the Torah, after joyously dancing with the Torahs and making Hakafot around the Bima. It reflects the joy and love we feel towards the Torah on this day of its celebration.

The Old Minhag Yerushalayim (GR"A) is not to read the Torah on Simchat Torah night. Most shuls do read it. Even those that are GR"A friendly.

[And, FYI, Shulchan Aruch does mention Torah reading on Leil Simchat Torah, but not from V'zot HaBracha. Rather different Parshiyot are read for each Aliya - indicating that this night's reading is not "regular" Torah reading, but rather a "celebration" of Torah on this special Chag.]

Three Torahs...

On Simchat Torah morning, after Hakafot, we read the sedra of V'Zot HaBracha. This is the only "Parshat HaShavua" that is not read on Shabbat (except in Eretz Yisrael where Simchat Torah can fall on Shabbat - as it does, this year). Seven people are called to the Torah, as on all Shabbatot. The sedra, however, is not completed with these 7 Aliyot.

(In most shuls,) these seven portions are read over and over again, many times, often with several Torahs being read simultaneously at different locations in shul. This allows all men to receive an Aliya in a shorter period of time than it would take if reading from one Torah only. Of course, all of this depends on the size of the K'hila.

There is a custom that the last Aliya before Chatan Torah is given to one of the oldest men in shul, and with him, all young boys (who cannot take their own Aliya) are invited to share this KOL HA'NE'ARIM Aliya.

Following this, the **Chatan Torah** is called for the last Aliya in the Torah. A chupa is often made over the Bima by four tall guys w ith a talit, as we complete the reading of the Torah.

After V'zot HaBracha (Sefer D'varim and the whole Torah) is completed, the Torah is lifted, closed, and "dressed" and a second Torah is read from.

This time, the honor of the Aliya goes to the **Chatan B'reishit** for whom will be read the beginning of the Torah. We never finish with the Torah. We begin it as soon as we get to the end. This is the “real” reason for our great joy. We celebrate, not the conclusion of the Torah, but the wonderful feeling of beginning again and of being the people to whom the Torah was given and for whom the Torah is our way of life. Again a chupa is made for this Aliya.

The whole first chapter of B'reishit is read, plus the first four p'sukim of the 2nd chapter, which describes the first Shabbat.

Maftir, read from a third Torah, comes from Parshat Pinchas and presents the Musaf of Shmini Atzeret.

The **Haftara** for Simchat Torah picks up where the Torah left off - with the beginning of the Book of Yehoshua. Aside from it being the natural choice for Haftara of V'zot HaBracha because it is its continuation, it also contains G-d's encouragement to Yehoshua to cling to the Torah and immerse himself in it day and night. This portion is particularly suited for Simchat Torah.

Mincha on Shabbat - Simchat Torah

We read the first part of the upcoming regularly scheduled sedra - B'REISHIT. This is rare in Eretz Yisrael, happening only when Sukkot-Simchat Torah runs from Shabbat to Shabbat.

It never happens outside of Israel. When their Sh'mini Atzeret is Shabbat (as it is this year), they read the first part of V'ZOT HAB'RACHA, since that is the upcoming sedra, being read on the following day - Sunday, Simchat Torah.