

## Torah Thoughts Sukkot

5779:

As we celebrate Sukkot this week, we once again consider the sukkah as symbol and reality. This is the festival of 'booths,' which is what 'Sukkot' means, and for a week our tradition is to make those booths our regular dwelling place and make our regular homes our 'irregular' dwelling place. In other words, in order to fully observe the traditions of Sukkot, we should eat all of our meals in the sukkah, sleep in it and spend any free time we have in it, going back into the house only for brief periods. There is an entire tractate of the Talmud called 'Sukkah,' and it goes into the details of how to build a sukkah in mind-numbing detail. By focusing so much attention on this structure, and by displaying our dependence on the sukkah, we also show our dependence upon God. Without God's acts of creation at the beginning of time, as well as continuously sustaining the world every moment since then, existence itself would be unthinkable.

While the symbolism is clear, the reality is much harder to achieve. Even in communities where sukkot are numerous and large enough to house an entire family, living in the sukkah for a week is a challenge. The weather is always an issue, both the cold and the rain, and in many places insects afflict us like a plague. Given that the early rabbis ruled that too much rain permits, even demands, that we leave the sukkah for the house, would they not say the same thing about extreme cold or bugs? Isn't Jewish law setting us up for failure here?

I find that the sukkah yields pleasure and meaning in direct proportion to the time and effort we put into it. Not building one, or even going into one during Sukkot, provides us nothing. Being present in one is a big step up from there, as we fill our senses with the sights, smells and tastes of nature. Going to the effort of building a sukkah endows it with the sweat of our labor; that always draws us closer to the object of that effort. And if we can go the extra mile and spend time in a sukkah that we ourselves have built, we will maximize the potential for beauty and meaning that is lying in potential this time of year, literally in our own backyards. After that, the number of hours spent in the sukkah, which *should* be maximized, is less important than the quality of our efforts to get to that point. We will get out of tradition at least as much as we put into it.

This year we are running a Sukkah Hop on Sunday September 30 from 3-6 pm, concluding with pizza in the hut. Join us in visiting neighborhood sukkot for snacks and songs.