

October 2018 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

As we prepare to complete our yearly cycle of reading Torah, (while Simchat Torah, technically speaking, occurred already on October 1, as per JCNWJ custom, we will be celebrating as a community on Friday night, October 5), it seems only appropriate to look back, as Moses did at the end of the Book of Deuteronomy, to remember where we've been. Unlike Moses, however, who reviewed 40 years of wandering in his final words to Israel, I'll take opportunity here to remind us simply of where we were last week when, following Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we celebrated Sukkot, a week-long holiday with its origins in Torah. What follows is a primer of sorts for the holiday:

*“On the fifteenth day of this seventh month there shall be the **Feast of Booths** to the Lord, [to last] seven days. The first day shall be a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations; seven days you shall bring offerings by fire to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall observe a sacred occasion and bring an offering by fire to the Lord; it is a solemn gathering: you shall not work at your occupations.”*

– Leviticus 23:34-36

Just to be sure we're all on the same page, let me offer a clarify some vocabulary related to this holiday.

The common noun, *sukkah* refers a “temporary hut-like structure.”

The common noun *sukkot* is simply the plural of *sukkah*, so it means “many temporary hut-like structures.

The proper noun, *Sukkot* is the name of the holiday itself.

Hopefully you were able to enjoy the JCNWJ *sukkah* which, once again this year, was put up by Karl Gross. Helping Karl were Marsha Gross and Sandy Kahan. Interior decorations were created and put up by the children and *madrichim* of our [Mike Weiner School of Jewish Learning](#). On behalf of our entire JCNWJ family, we thank all of you with most sincere gratitude.

This holiday actually goes by a few different names. In addition to the Feast of Booths (*Sukkot*), we sometimes call it “**The Festival of Ingathering**” (*Hag Ha-Asif*) because on Sukkot we celebrate the harvest (see: Exodus 23:16). It is also called the “**Time of our Happiness**” (*Z'man Simchateinu*) because we celebrate the dual completion of harvest and also the precarious period of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Sukkot is one of three pilgrimage festivals when Torah commands Israel to bring sacrifices to the Great Temple in Jerusalem, the other two being Passover (when we

celebrate the Exodus from Egypt) and Shavuot (when we celebrate the giving of Torah and commandments).

There are three principle reasons we build *sukkot*:

- To commemorate the huts that farmers used to live in during the harvest season at this time of year (hence, Sukkot is a harvest holiday)
- To commemorate the huts that the Children of Israel used for shelter during our 40 years of wandering through the desert
- To commemorate the huts that Israelites used for shelter during the week-long pilgrimage festival in Jerusalem

During Sukkot, we engage in the waving of two ritual objects: the lulav and etrog. The *lulav* is comprised of a palm branch, a myrtle branch, and a willow branch all bunched together. The *etrog* is a citron that looks kind of like an oversized, pear-shaped, bumpy lemon. During Sukkot we hold the *lulav* and *etrog* and then, after saying the appropriate blessing, wave them in “all” six directions (east, south, west, north, above, and below). According to rabbinic tradition, these specific four species were chosen because of their physical similarities to various human body parts (palm branch resembles the spine; myrtle leaf resembles the eyes; willow leaf resembles the mouth, and the *etrog* resembles the heart). As such, one of the lessons from Sukkot is that we should worship God in every direction with our entire body.

You might be interested to know, by the way, that Jewish tradition teaches the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden was actually an *etrog* tree. During Sukkot, there are three principal *mitzvot* (commandments) that we are meant to fulfill. We are to:

- Dwell (or eat) in a sukkah
- Wave the four species (lulav & etrog)
- Rejoice (my favorite!)

There are, of course, many spiritual concepts we should consider during Sukkot as well, chief among them are hunger and homelessness, as represented by the temporary shelter in which we live that is decorated with symbols of the harvest. This is indeed the time of year when temperatures begin to dip and both homelessness and hunger prepare to do their worst damage. I pray that we, as a community, will be up to the task of helping those in need.

I write this message having just fulfilled some of our Sukkot responsibilities by harvesting tomatoes for those in need at [America's Grow a Row](#) with [Sisterhood](#) and the [religious school](#). It was a wonderful experience, but this alone is not enough. I encourage you please to continue donating to our ongoing food drive at the temple. And when the time comes to collect and donate whatever other items can be put to good use by those who need them most, I know we will be able to count on every one of us to do what we can. Sukkot 5779 may now be over, but the need will become only more severe in the coming months. I pray that together, we will continue to make

a difference in the lives of others, because when we do, I believe that brings a smile, anthropomorphically speaking, to God's face.

Blessings to all,

Rabbi Dubin

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