



Sukkot in the Time of Corona

In some ways *Sukkot* is the ideal holiday to celebrate during the time of corona. At first glance we can see why. It is a holiday focused around a temporary structure which has 2 1/2 walls and a roof that allows us to see the stars. In other words, there is a lot of circulation and we have learned that being outdoors is safer than being indoors when it comes to this virulent virus!

But I'd like to think that the reason that this particular holiday has survived more than 3,000 years is because its symbolism resonates with us not just now, but at all times. We may think that we live in a time of greater fragility, more ambiguity, and less certainty. But the reality is that throughout our 3,000-year history we have experienced quite a bit of all of these feelings. *Sukkot* is a reminder of the transition from slavery to freedom. The ultimate "new normal" if there ever was one! For the first time in centuries Jews had to figure out how to govern themselves, find food and water, and of course shelter. Under the watchful eye of the taskmaster they may have known fear and abuse, but they also knew what was expected and what life would bring, even if that was something unpleasant and cruel.

With freedom came responsibility and yes... ambiguity, and uncertainty and a reminder that life itself was quite fragile.

Over the centuries when we faced forced conversions, pogroms, crusades, the Holocaust, and any number of plagues and anti-semitic acts that put our lives in danger, we nevertheless persevered. Celebrating *Sukkot* kept us grounded in our humanity. On the one hand the *sukkah* itself was flimsy, but it had to be strong enough to weather any storm or high wind. It was resilient. And one of the core mitzvot of *Sukkot* was *Ushpizin*-the welcoming of spiritual ancestors. We learned we were never alone. Our history, our heritage, our values followed us everywhere we went. And just as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and King David faced their challenges, they never gave up hope. They always looked towards a better future for their children, and their children's children.

In the midst of difficult times it is easy to lose hope. It is easy to glorify what was and to dismiss the hardships that were a part of our past. But *Sukkot* takes all these feelings to task. Leave the security of the known, and spend a week in a simple fragile dwelling. Let yourself be vulnerable, and invite in the stranger, and those who would seek out your hospitality. Let the wind blow, and the rain settle upon the porous roof of our *sukkah*, and we shall pay no mind. For this is *Z'man Simchateinu*-the season of our joy; not because of what we do not have, but because of who we are. Not because of what we have run from; but because of what we run toward. Not because fear has conquered us, but because the joy of our history, our values, our very lives is a reminder that this too shall pass...In a week our *Sukkah* will come down, only to be rebuilt again next year. And we will engage once again in this mitzvah stronger than before. It took our ancestors 40 years of **wandering** in the desert to figure this out. Perhaps we are somewhat fortunate for it has taken us only 7 months of **wondering** in the desert to figure it out for our generation.

Chag Sameach everyone!