

## **Our Sukkah and Our Spiritual Soul Sukkot**

By Rabbi Jason Miller

Tonight begins the eight-day holiday of Sukkot. And there's a well-known joke that is told every year around this time based on the children's book by David Adler:

A man, living in New York, builds a sukkah on the roof of his apartment building a couple of days before the Chag - the holiday. When the landlord sees it, he is livid and demands that he take it down at once. The man refuses on the religious grounds that he has a First Amendment right to build a sukkah on the roof of the building. So, the landlord takes the case to court.

The landlord argues that it is unseemly, and against the rules and regulations of the building. The Jewish judge listens patiently and then offers his verdict: "I agree with the landlord in this case," the judge ruled. "And I therefore rule that you have ten days to take down your hut."

The other evening, a high school student asked me if Sukkot was a fun holiday. He was convinced that Jewish holidays were simply no fun, especially after Yom Kippur. I assured him that Sukkot is, in fact, a very happy holiday. I even quoted the mitzvah - the commandment - from the Torah concerning Sukkot: v'hayita ach sameach. That is to say, you must be nothing but joyful on Sukkot. Sukkot is also a very spirited holiday, as we march with our lulav and etrog around the sanctuary, and eat meals and visit with our neighbors in their sukkahs.

In fact, thinking about the spirituality of sukkot led me to compare the sukkah to our spirituality. Now, I know that "spirituality" is a very loaded term and that it is tossed around an awful lot these days. But, if you listen to the way I describe this analogy, you might find that it speaks to you as well.

You see, our spirituality is not a permanent feeling. No one, not even the most fervent Chasid in the world, feels spiritual 24/7/365. Our sukkahs are by definition, temporary. If your sukkah is permanent, then it is not a sukkah! Our spirituality is never very sturdy either. We can feel very spiritual and then, in an instant, we lose the wind from our sails. Maybe we found ourselves in the "zone," and all of a sudden, because of some extraneous event we become disturbed out of our feeling of spirituality.

Sukkahs are fun to build up as well. So too, it can be a fun, exhilarating endeavor to develop our spirituality. Maybe we will learn new things about ourselves as we take to finding a more spiritual self. We might discover music that we didn't know we enjoyed, or a new hobby or a new passion. We are all spiritual seekers. Who isn't searching for something more? When we build our sukkah each year, we explore more about the history of our people, the traditions that bind us as a faith community and the meaning behind our Jewish customs.

We can construct our sukkah with others or on our own. We can delve into the spiritual realms within our kehillah - our community, or solo. When we build with friends, we will gain new relationships, and share newfound spirituality. When we build alone, we find that we grow as individuals, we feel energized, rejuvenated, and free. There is no right way to find spirituality; we need to explore our spiritual selves in a variety of paths.

When we take our sukkahs down at the close of the holiday, we see that spirituality is a beautiful thing to possess, but it does not last eternally. Nor, can it last for eternity. We will yet again reach that level of spirituality, whether through kavvanah-rich prayer, or by reaching out into the soul of another, or through deep meditation, or music, or art, or conversation, or study, or an exploration into nature.

Like our sukkahs, our spirituality offers us shelter and protection. We are all the better for having it. Our mitzvah during these days of sukkot is leisheiv ba'sukka - we are commanded to sit in the sukkah.

Certainly having a sukkah makes this mitzvah possible. Finding spirituality makes so much of our Jewish culture easier - prayer, ritual, eating, Shabbat, and so on.

Finally, on Sukkot, we must leave that which we are used to. We leave the comfort and security of our homes and venture out into something strange and different. When we search for spirituality, however we interpret that, we also have to try new things. We have to leave what we are used to behind and take some risks.

Who among us isn't searching for a spiritual home? For increased meaning and purpose in our spiritual life? Within the walls of the sukkah, we can experience an increasing sense of spiritual fulfillment and communal inclusiveness. Ufros aleynu sukkat shalom - spread over us a sukkah of peace. May we all find the spirituality within the walls of the sukkah during this festive time.

Wishing you all a Shabbat Shalom and Moadim L'simcha - a Happy, Joyous Sukkot!