

Sukkot 5780

Chag sameach and a wonderful Sukkot to everyone! Even those who are not here today. I am still reeling from the High Holidays a bit. Just yesterday I wrote a check and forgot and put down the date as 5779. Sukkot is a bit of a strange holiday, from the sukkah to the lulav, from the commandment to be joyful to the not so joyful Book of Kohelet that we read on this holiday. The contradictions come together in the sukkah itself.

The sukkah is beautiful, and it is perhaps one of the most fun things we are commanded to do in Judaism, to have guests over for dinner in our sukkah. The squeezing in, the decorations, the lights, the picnic-y feel without having to sit on the ground or carry the food vast distances, all of this is wonderful. And also the sukkah is frail and impermanent. It will not protect us from the rain or the cold. If it is more like my sukkah than the one Scott and his crew built today, it may fall down before the eight days of the holiday are up. Even if it doesn't fall down, we will take it down pretty soon.

This duality is reflected in the world around us as well. We love nature, the world is beautiful. We depend on land upon which to stand, water to drink, air to breathe. It turns out that nature is a little more fragile than we thought. As we enjoy them, our use makes the future existence of the resources of our world a little more precarious. We are eating and drinking and enjoying ourselves, and our sukkah is about to fall down.

What might the future look like if we do not stop to shore our sukkah up? What will the world look like in 2050? What would it look like if 15-37% of all species are extinct? What will life be like if vast areas of the planet become uninhabitable by human beings? Where will those refugees go? What will we be eating then? I am sorry if this is frightening. I am frightened. I hope to be around in 2050. I certainly hope that my children are around. And then, sometimes I almost hope that we are not.

Perhaps the message of Sukkot is that we are dependent on Gd, not on the frail structures we put up ourselves. But, as the saying goes, Gd helps them that helps themselves. We thank Gd for bringing bread forth from the earth, but we still plant it and water it and reap it and thresh it and grind it and bake it. We won't make it without Gd's help, but Gd won't help us unless we do everything we can to stabilize this dangerous situation, this precarious sukkah.

What should we do to sustain the earth? Everything we can. One person turning off the lights will not make a difference. One person choosing not to buy a plastic bottle of

water won't make a difference. But those are the building blocks that will go into building a stronger structure.

We must do everything we can. Every decision we make should be colored by an awareness of the danger in which we find ourselves. What we buy. What we eat. Where we go. How we get there. Who we vote for. Whether we speak out. Whether we protest.

In the best case scenario, we will switch to more sustainable energy, food, packaging, housing. We will be less focussed on the material and more on the spiritual. New inventions will help us, and the politicians and businesspeople who ignored or abetted the danger will be only a bad memory. Things will be pretty good, and people will say that we were alarmists, that it never got so bad. Let them say so. This best case scenario will not happen without constant struggle.

Tonight, and for the next seven nights, we will dwell in our sukkah. It will be beautiful, but the wind will blow on us, the rain may fall on us. We will look up and see the stars, and it may cross our minds that we are not as safe as we think. That the structures we have build to protect us are frail and insubstantial. Yom Kippur proved to us that change is possible. Sukkot will prove that it is truly necessary.