



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday September 29, 2023
Parshat: Sukkot

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

The Sukkah of Peace

L'shana Tovah! I was delighted to see so many of you in the synagogue on the High Holidays this year, and connect with others over livestream. In many ways, this was the first (I hesitate to use the term normal) High Holiday season since 2019 that did not include the difficult COVID restrictions and precautions of the past three years. It felt both familiar, and wonderful. I look forward to seeing you often in the new year. And now they have concluded. An intense seven weeks of effort and preparation ended on Monday night with the blowing of the Shofar to mark the end of Yom Kippur. One of the first *Mitzvot* we are supposed to observe after breaking the fast is to begin the building of our Sukkot in observance of the holiday of *Sukkot*, which begins tonight. I built mine on Tuesday and Wednesday. The synagogue Sukkah was completed on Thursday.

What should a Sukkah look like? My guess is that you would imagine something like the one in at our synagogue, or something smaller. Whether handmade, or prefabricated, elegant or simple, large enough for 150 people, or small enough for a family, we have an image of a not particularly fancy, not particularly elaborate temporary structure. It is designed to be a temporary creation that can't withstand the elements, yet nonetheless is such a big part of the observance of the day.

We know what a Sukkah should look like. We know the difference between a Sukkah, a tree house, and a tent. We have laws that address the proper way to build a Sukkah – when to build it, when not to build it, how high the walls can be, how many walls are actually necessary. But the Talmud records a debate that demonstrates that these assumptions were not always shared.

The Talmud (*Sukkah* 11B) records a debate as to the very nature of the Sukkah itself. Based upon an interpretation of the verse from the Book of *Vayikra* (Leviticus 23:43) “...that I made the people of Israel live in *Sukkot* when I brought them out of the land of Egypt,” Rabbi Akiva taught that they referred to *Sukkot mamash* – real structures in which the people actually lived during the journey in the wilderness. But Rabbi Eliezer understood them to be *Annei Kavod*, clouds of glory with which God protected the people while they wandered in the desert.

But there is a third vision of the Sukkah with which you may be more familiar with than you think. Every Shabbat evening, we pray that God spread his *Sukkat shalom*, His Sukkah of peace on us, on all Israel, and over Jerusalem.

We are in a joyous time in the Jewish calendar, a season so festive that mourning is not permitted. Yet, given the amount of violent behavior and bellicose rhetoric throughout the world as we celebrate this most happy holiday, may it be that this aspect of Sukkot, the idea of *Sukkot shalom*, animates this holiday season. For in the absence of good solutions to this dangerous problem, perhaps all we can do is pray.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Arthur Weiner