



Around the Shabbat Table

**Sukkot 5764
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Shalom! For this first full edition of this year's Around the Shabbat Table, we are sending out an edited version of an article that was originally scheduled to be our first edition in 2001. Sadly, the events of 9-11 that year changed our lives and our calendar. Still it is interesting to see what our thoughts about Sukkot might have been just two years ago, and to contrast that with our thoughts today.

Introduction

This weekend we begin the celebration of the holiday of Sukkot, which commemorates both the harvest season as well as the exodus from Egypt. We do so by building booths (Sukkot) in which many people eat or even live during the holiday. The *sukkah* is a temporary structure, whose covering is built out of natural materials and is somewhat open to the sky and to the elements.

There is actually some debate in Jewish sources as to what the *sukkah* itself represents. One opinion in the Talmud is that it represents actual booths that our ancestors lived in during their wanderings in the desert. Another Talmudic authority disagrees, suggesting that the *sukkah* represents the "cloud of glory," that led the people of Israel through the desert. Some historians believe that the *sukkah* is really modeled after the booths that harvesters used at this season of the year, when they lived in the fields while collecting the earth's produce.

One interesting concept that has taken root is that of the "*sukkat shalom*," the "booth of peace." While not necessarily connected specifically to this holiday, the following prayer is a part of the evening prayers for Shabbat and major holidays:

"Praised are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who spread a booth of peace over us, over the people Israel, and over Jerusalem."

Another interesting idea is that of Sukkot being a holiday that relates to *all* people of the world. The Bible speaks about a future time when at which all people will come to worship God together on this holiday of Sukkot. This teaching is actually part of the *haftarah*, the prophetic portion that is read in synagogues on the first day of the holiday.



Questions for Your Family's Discussion

As your family shares a meal over this holiday, you might want to discuss the following questions:

1. The idea of *Sukkat Shalom*, a "booth of peace" serves to remind us to pursue peace. We continue to see violent events in Israel, reminding us of how difficult it is to achieve peace. What are your family's views on the situation in Israel? How can Israel achieve peace? Are there things that we can do to help?
2. As mentioned in the introduction, most of this article was originally written before the attack on the United States on 9-11. Have your thoughts about peace changed since then? How?
3. Our community often focuses on how we, as Jews, are different than other people or other religions. Yet, it is the holiday of Sukkot that the Bible suggests will one day be celebrated by all people. Why is it that this holiday, more than any other, was thought to be relevant to all people?

Some Texts to Wrestle With

The word *Sukkah* (Plural: *Sukkot*) is found in a number of places in the *Tanach*, the Bible. For example:

- ☆ "You shall live in booths seven days...in order that future generations might know that I made the people of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 23:42-43).
 1. In what way does dwelling in a Sukkah teach future generations about the Exodus?
 2. What is the value of knowing that God "made the people of Israel live in booths" when coming out of Egypt?
- ☆ "All who survive...will make a pilgrimage each year to bow low to the King, God...to observe the holiday of Sukkot" (Zechariah 14:16).

Most of us have learned that, at least in modern times, Judaism does not generally seek converts. Does the verse above seem to agree with that belief? Why/why not?

Towards an Action Agenda

The Sukkah is a temporary structure, reminding us that there are those people in our community who do not have a permanent roof over their heads. We encourage you and your family to get involved in helping people in need by volunteering or raising money for organizations that help those whose living quarters are "temporary" year-round.

1. You can see what some congregations and communities are doing (and perhaps institute a program in your own synagogue), by looking at the website of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism:
<http://www.rac.org//social/servicehomeless.html>
2. Learn about how our Jewish community, through UJA-Federation and its organizations, uses volunteers to address the needs of the homeless:
http://www.ujafedny.org/site/PageServer?pagename=handson_homeless



Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to RavADS@bjeny.org

Around the Shabbat Table is a project of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York. If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: www.bjeny.org

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