

Rabbi Fox's Message for Temple Beth Shalom's
Heshvan/Kislev 5768 (November 2007) TBS Newsletter

You shall live in booths seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in booths, in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I the Lord your God.

—Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:42-43

Living in booths? We have such a negative feeling about booths in our world today. We think of constricted and broken places — from toll booths to homeless shanties. Living in a booth is not what most of us would consider a life of comfort or joy. Yet, that is exactly how we are told our ancestors viewed the Pilgrimage Holiday of Sukkot. And it is that feeling of joy that arises within us when we think of the holiday today.

Just imagine: The rains begin like clockwork in Israel just about this time of the year, with gentle, brief drizzles perhaps once or twice during Sukkot, accompanied with a cooling in the warm end-of-Summer temperatures. The idea of being able to sleep in those cool temperatures and eat outdoors is a very pleasant thing.

Even more joyous is not the feeling of vulnerability that comes from depending upon a temporary structure but rather that the Sukkah is a symbol of our identity, of our ancestors' redemption from slavery, and from the worst of times for our People having been overcome. Without that redemption, our history would have been much more bleak and far more short. Without our ancestors' redemption, we would not exist today.

With all of this as a backdrop, you can understand why dwelling in the Sukkah is a wonderful mitzvah to fulfill. And, because of a donation this year of a newly built Sukkah, Temple Beth Shalom members can come and sit and eat in and enjoy that very mitzvah. By the time you read this, the Sukkah will have been built and the holiday started, and even a congregational Shabbat dinner will have been held in the Sukkah.

In the time left in the holiday, however, please take a moment to stop by the synagogue's parking lot to step inside the structure. Have a seat and say the following blessings to fulfill the mitzvah of dwelling in the Sukkah:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לַיִּשֵׁב בַּסֻּכָּה.

Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, asher kideshanu b'mitz'votav v'tzivanu leisheiv basukkah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our G-d, Sovereign of the Universe, who has made us holy through your commandments, and commanded us to dwell in the Sukkah.

Also, please don't forget the blessing upon your first visit to the Sukkah:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהֶחֱיָנוּ וְקִיָּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְן הַזֶּה.

Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, shehechianu v'kiyamanu v'higiyanu

lazman hazeh.

Blessed are you, Adonai our G-d, Sovereign of the Universe, for granting us life, for sustaining us, and for bringing us to this day.

May this holiday and this time of year truly be, as it is written, “a season of joy” for you and all who are dear to you.

Rabbi Gerald Fox

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