

There is no Happiness Unless All are Fed! – A Sukkot Teaching

Our Jewish holiday of Sukkot, the festival of Booths, is also called “**The Time of our Happiness.**” It is one of three Biblically mandated festivals, along with Passover and Shavuot. These holidays are called Pilgrimage Festivals because in the ancient world we would literally make a “pilgrimage” up to Jerusalem to celebrate these holidays. In addition to the deeply religious meanings connected to each festival, these holidays coincide with the harvest cycle in the Land of Israel. This timing inextricably ties us to God’s earth. A crucial aspect of all three of these festivals is the Bible’s care for those less fortunate. If there are people around us who cannot celebrate because they do not have food to sustain themselves, then our ability to truly celebrate is greatly diminished. To quote a different Biblical text, “**we are** our brother and sisters keepers.”

The section of Torah (Bible) that we chant in synagogue on Sukkot contains the following verse in Leviticus, “When you reap the harvest of your land you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord Your God.” This commandment teaches us that at the times of our greatest joy it is our sacred responsibility to remember those who are in need and to lessen their burdens.

The Sukka is a fragile structure that reminds our People that during the 40 years that the Jewish People wandered in the desert, our protection was flimsy huts, and our sustenance came from God in the form of *manna*. The Sukka reminds us of the fragility of our world and our circumstances. Today, as we celebrate the holiday of Sukkot, we are reminded of the fragility of life. We understand that “80 million Americans struggle with food insecurity today. Before Covid-19, the number was 40 million.” (Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger 9/13/21) On this Sukkot, set aside the proverbial corners of your fields, a portion of what you have to share with those in need. Contact your elected officials to secure funding for programs that fight food insecurity. Make this a holiday of joy and happiness by sharing our great bounty.

Hag Sahmeah – Happy Holidays and *Moadim L’simcha* – May these be joyous times.

Rabbi Andrea Merow