

**Spiritual teachings for Sukkot 2006:  
The Meaning of the Festival of Booths for Moderns**

October 6, 2006

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*Abstract: So what does God want us to think about on Sukkot? On Sukkot, God wants us to count all our blessings and to grow in our capacity for appreciation and gratitude. Why? Because it is our human nature to take our most important blessings for granted. as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once said, "Humankind will not perish for want of information, but only for want of appreciation."*

*Chag sameach! Moadim lesimchah!* Tonight we welcome Sukkot, the Festival of Booths. Through the kindling of light and the blessing over wine, we have declared ourselves to be in sacred time.

We are taught in the book of Psalms (90:12), "Teach us to count our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." Well, every Jewish festival gives us an opportunity to "get a heart of wisdom." Every Jewish festival is a window into the mind of God and what God wants us to think about and grow.

So what does God want us to think about on Sukkot? On Sukkot, God wants us to count all our blessings and to grow in our capacity for appreciation and gratitude. Why? Because it is our human nature to take our most important blessings for granted. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said, "Humankind will not perish for want of information, but only for want of appreciation." Robert Louis Stevenson once said, "[the person] who has forgotten to be thankful has fallen asleep in the midst of life." Poet Marge Piercy writes, "...the discipline of blessings is to taste each moment, the bitter, the sour, the sweet and the salty, and be glad for what does not hurt."

This festival of Sukkot is not just for tonight. It goes for seven days. So on each day of this festival, let us think about a different blessing in our lives. For one of life's great joys is the capacity to savor and to appreciate all the good things that do come our way. And in truth, all of us have so much to be grateful for: the blessings of love, and family, the blessings of good health, the blessing of this temple, our shelter from the storm, our haven of peace.

And once we have counted our blessings, God wants us to share our good fortune with those who are less fortunate than ourselves. Sukkot reminds us to engage in extra special acts of caring, generosity, and compassion not just on Thanksgiving – but all year round. For God wants us to experience how helping others is truly one of life's greatest joys.

Tonight we've already learned about the symbolic meaning of the *lulav* and *etrog*. What can we learn from the symbolism of the sukkah, the harvest booth? The sukkah is fragile and exposed to the elements. So are the homeless and the hungry. The sukkah provides protection from the hot sun and the cold rain. So we must spread a sukkah, a protective shelter, over the poor and those

who are most vulnerable. The stars must be visible through the sukkah's thatched roof. So we must provide a glimmer of hope for those less fortunate than ourselves by sharing our blessings with them. Above all, Sukkot teaches us that all the good we do comes back to us in one way or another. What we sow, we reap. If we plant love and goodness, we shall surely reap it in the beautiful harvest of our lives. *Chag sameach! Moadim lesimchah!* Happy holiday to all!