

Sukkot: The Problem with Possessions

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Abstract: Material possessions are nice to own. But the problem with possessions is that they own us. They possess us. After a while, we start thinking the way to happiness is by owning lots of stuff. Sitting in the sukkah reminds us that the most important things in life -- love and friendship -- money can never buy.

I've often wondered why so many Jewish Holy Days and Festivals come so close together. I mean, couldn't God have spread them out just a little bit?

Think about it. We celebrated Rosh Hashanah only 12 days ago. Yom Kippur was just yesterday. This coming Monday we celebrate the Festival of Sukkot, the Jewish Festival of Thanksgiving. Then the following Monday night is Simchat Torah when we restart the annual cycle of Torah readings and dance with our sacred Torah scrolls.

Come to think of it, I do see a reason for this intense succession of one Holy Day and Festival after another. It's not just exhausting. It's also exhilarating!

After the High Holy Days we are filled with a sense of serenity and optimism for the New Year. Mindful of all our New Year's resolutions, we are energized and enthusiastic to make them happen. We feel new and improved.

While we definitely feel a sense of reward for all that we accomplished during the High Holy Days, we did spend a lot of time within the four walls of the sanctuary. So now Judaism sends us outdoors to celebrate the Festival of Sukkot, to enjoy the beauty of the natural world, the crisp fall air, the crunch of leaves underfoot, and to sit, eat, and perhaps even sleep in the sukkah, the harvest booth. That's brilliant! That's really brilliant!

What's more, on this coming Monday night, on your way home from Sukkot services of course but before you park yourself in front of the TV to watch the New York Giants football game at 8:30pm, I encourage you to look up at the night sky.

Do you know what you will see? What you will see is a gorgeous full moon. This is no coincidence. The full moon that always occurs during Sukkot symbolizes how we feel by the time we reach this festival: full, whole, and shining. And when we step into the sukkah, the harvest booth, we are struck by how fragile it is and exposed to the elements. This gets us thinking: so are the homeless. We are taught that the stars must be visible through the sukkah's thatched roof. This gets us thinking: by sharing our blessings with those less fortunate than ourselves, we can provide a glimmer of hope, we can be a star in the sky, for the hungry and the poor.

When we step into the sukkah, the harvest booth, we are also struck by how stark and less comfy it is compared to our homes with fluffy couches and big flat-screen TVs. This gets us thinking: material possessions are nice to own. But the problem with possessions is that they own us. They possess us. After a while, we start thinking the way to happiness is by owning lots of stuff. Sitting in the sukkah reminds us that the most important things in life – love and friendship - money can never buy.

True shelter is to be found in the amassing of loving relationships and belonging to a caring community, a community like Temple Sinai. True shelter is God's guidance, nature's goodness, and each other's love.

So, yes, it's quite true that observing all the fall Holy Days are quite a whirlwind. But you know what? I wouldn't want it any other way. For each Holy Day has its wisdom to share. And celebrating them all gives us the most peaceful feeling: all is well. Please join me now in the prayer "May You Always Have Enough."

May You Always Have Enough

May you always have --
Enough happiness to keep you sweet,
Enough trials to keep you strong,
Enough hope to keep you happy,
Enough failure to keep you humble,
Enough success to keep you eager,
Enough friends to give you comfort,
Enough wealth to meet your needs,
Enough enthusiasm to look forward,
Enough faith to banish depression,
Enough determination to make each day better than yesterday.
And let us all say: amen.

Rabbi Harry H. Epstein