

A Weekly Message of Torah from Rabbi Rheins

Sukkot & Shabbat: A Time for Joyous Thanksgiving

This Shabbat is called “*Chol HaMoed Sukkot*,” the Sabbath during the Festival of Sukkot, the Festival of Booths. It is our celebration of the harvest and a time for thanksgiving. Under a glorious Sukkah, we surround ourselves with nature's bounty and join with family and friends. Sukkot marks the changing of the seasons; the autumn breeze chases away the last wisps of summer and the sky seems bluer and fresher. Coming on the heels of the High Holy Days, Sukkot helps us bring in the New Year with a renewed sense of the natural beauty and joy.

But Sukkot also has a deeper meaning. Let us try to understand the profound significance Sukkot has had for our ancestors. For them, Sukkot wasn't just a quaint autumn holiday. In days gone by, when most people worked on farms, the harvest represented their yearly income. With the harvest in and the produce off to market, your bills could at last be paid off and you had, with God's blessings, enough left over to enjoy life a bit. Cupboards and cellars suddenly were filled with fresh food. Vegetables were pickled and fruits dried or preserved for the winter months ahead. But now, right after the harvest, everything was fresh and ripe and juicy. This was the time of year when your material wealth was at its greatest and you could at last take a deep breath of satisfaction and contentment.

And yet, it is testimony to the moral greatness of our heritage that we have been taught that on the very day of our harvest, at the time of our wealth and bounty, that this is the time to share with others. Indeed, many of the symbols of Sukkot teach us to be more aware of others. But most prominent among these is the Sukkah which, according to tradition, is intended to make us more sensitive to the poor and hungry. As the 12th century commentator Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir (Rashbam), who was the grandson of Rashi, wrote:

Therefore, the people leave their houses, which are full of the bounty from the harvest, and dwell in sukkot. This is so they will remember those who had no possessions in the wilderness and no houses in which to live (cv. Leviticus 23:43).

Rashbam's thoughts echoed those of another great teacher, Philo, the Alexandrian Jew, who wrote some 2,100 years ago, concerning the dwelling under the sukkah:

It is well in wealth to remember your poverty, in distinction your insignificance, in high offices your previous position as a commoner, in peace your dangers in war, on land the storms of the seas, in cities the life of loneliness. For there is no pleasure greater in high prosperity than to call to mind old misfortunes. And besides giving pleasure, it is considerable help in the practice of virtue.

(Philo, Special Laws 2.206)

And so, as we enjoy our harvest of blessings, let us always keep in mind those who are struggling in our community. The greatest responses of thanksgiving are the generous acts of *tzedakah*, “*charity*.”

At Temple Sinai, we will take the time on this special Shabbat during Sukkot to honor the families who have been members for 25 years or more. Let us all join together for this week’s Shabbat celebration in order to express appreciation for those who have built and sustained our community!

In addition, please note that our *Erev Shemini Atzeret-Simchat Torah* programs and services begin Sunday, October 20. There will be a 5:15pm dinner under the Sukkah, followed by a 5:45pm Festival service and then a joyous Torah celebration at 6:15pm. Our *Shemini Atzeret-Simchat Torah* services continue the next morning, Monday, October 21 at 10:00am, during which we will observe *Yizkor* in memory of our deceased loved ones.

This service will conclude with a Free Brunch for all who attend.

We hope to see you on Shabbat and at our Temple Sinai *Shemini Atzeret-Simchat Torah* services!

Shabbat Shalom v’Chag Sukkot Sameiach!

Rick

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