

■ Finding Shelter and Joy: Three Teachings for Sukkot

A Torah Study for Adults

Congregation Mishkan Or Sukkot Study

Led by Rabbi Robert Nosanchuk

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1. Sukkat Shalom — A Protective Place to Dwell in Difficult Times

Traditional Sources

Isaiah 4:6 — “It shall be a booth (sukkah) for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and shelter from storm and rain.”

Mishnah Sukkah 1:1 — “A sukkah that cannot stand on its own is not valid.”

Midrash Psalms 27:5 — “In the day of trouble, God will shelter me in God’s sukkah.”

Modern Reflections

Rabbi Sharon Brous — “We dwell in a sukkah not to escape the world, but to face it honestly. To sit inside something so fragile and still call it home is an act of radical faith. It’s how we remind ourselves that our safety ultimately rests not in walls, but in one another.”

Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin — “When we build a sukkah, we build a partnership with the wind and the rain, with the trees that gave their branches and the earth that holds them up. The sukkah reminds us that we live within a web of shelter — not only the one we build, but the one that life itself continually offers.”

Maya Angelou — “The ache for home lives in all of us — the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.”

Discussion Questions

- What kind of sukkah — emotional, spiritual, or communal — protects you in times of vulnerability?
- How do we balance the sukkah’s fragility with its promise of safety?
- How do Rabbi Brous and Rabbi Cardin each expand the meaning of shelter?
- What might it mean for our community to become a *sukkat shalom* — a shelter of peace — in the world right now?

2. The Command to Rejoice — Even When You Don’t Feel Like It

Traditional Sources

Deuteronomy 16:14–15 — “You shall rejoice in your festival... and you shall be altogether joyful.”

Talmud, Sukkah 53a — “One who has never seen the rejoicing at the Simchat Beit HaSho’eva has never seen joy in their life.”

Ecclesiastes 3:4 — “A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.”

Modern Reflections

Rabbi Dannel Schwartz — “Joy is not something that happens to us; it is something we claim. It is a discipline of the soul, a decision to see blessing even when the world gives us reasons not to. Joy, in Jewish life, is the proof that faith still lives within us.”

Leonard Cohen — “Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack in everything — that’s how the light gets in.”

Discussion Questions

- What is the difference between feeling joy and choosing joy?
- When have you experienced joy and sorrow existing side by side?
- How might Rabbi Schwartz’s idea of joy as a discipline change the way we understand the Sukkot commandment to rejoice?
- How can joy itself be an act of spiritual resistance?

3. Sukkot Reflected Through Famous Voices

Traditional Anchor

Leviticus 23:42–43 — “You shall dwell in booths for seven days... so that your generations may know that I made the Israelites dwell in booths when I brought them out of Egypt.”

Modern Reflections

Abraham Joshua Heschel — “To be spiritual is to be amazed. Sukkot is Judaism’s festival of amazement — where the walls are open, and the world itself becomes a sanctuary.”

Martin Buber — “All real living is meeting.”

Nelson Mandela — “Our human compassion binds us the one to the other — not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.”

Elie Wiesel — “When we build the sukkah, we build hope — frail, open, exposed hope, but hope nonetheless.”

Discussion Questions

- Which of these reflections resonates most with your own sense of Sukkot?
- How might the sukkah symbolize our relationship to the natural world and to one another?
- How do Mandela’s and Wiesel’s ideas of hope speak to the act of dwelling in faith amid uncertainty?

Closing Reflection: Invite participants to name one “beam” or “leaf” of their own *sukkat shalom* — something they build or nurture that brings peace, safety, or joy to others.