

Sukkot.

It's one of the most important holidays of the Jewish year.

It's commanded in Torah.

It's linked to the Exodus from Egypt.

It's attached the Fall Harvest.

It's one of the most important holidays of the Jewish year.

And yet.

One of the least practiced by American Reform Jews.

And I've never been clear why.

It has all the components of what attracts us to Judaism.

It is experiential.

It has good food associated with it. Think stews, stuffed cabbage, and butternut squash soup.

It involves the earth and being outdoors.

It represents our wandering and ...

Oh.

Maybe that is why.

It reminds us of something we don't always want to admit or acknowledge.

Impermanence.

When we lived in the shtetl, we knew from impermanence.

But in the comfort of our modern life and the physical houses we construct we don't want to admit.

It could all be gone in a flash.

And worse yet – none of it really matters.

Because what matters is home.

For without home, we have little.

And what has kept the Jewish people strong has not been our physical, personal houses but our desire to create a sense of home with our nuclear families, our extended families, and our larger community.

And so there I sat on Tuesday evening, the third night of Sukkot – not at temple but at a church downtown, with a few Jews, many Christians, a pagan, and some non-believers to discuss Sukkot and what it means today. A local

intentional community (Anthony's Plot) that works with the homeless population has been holding events all week to highlight something called, and purposefully timed with Sukkot: The Festival of Shelters.

For all my life I have translated Sukkot as Booth or Hut. But of course, shelter is the best translation. For that is what we dwelt in while wandering out of Egypt and what our ancestors built in the fields during the fall harvest. Temporary shelters. And that is the image used by the rabbis as they described what our prayers hope for us as God spreads over us a peaceful Sukkah/Shelter at night.

The Festival of Shelters is a week-long celebration of Sukkot with the intent to raise awareness about matters effecting those in our community who have no homes. They are sleeping in cars, on the street or in shelters. And why are they sleeping without a home? There are many layers to the answer: crime, education, jobs, drugs, family abuse ...

And tonight on the bima, I have placed the wall of a cardboard boxes used by someone to sleep in but repurposed to highlight the need for us to build and live in Houses of Tzedek – Justice. To create a world of Tzedek.

What Sukkot teaches us, among other things: Life is impermanent and imperfect. Our journey meanders and is uncertain. Houses are physical necessities but homes take great care and attention. We have not only a houseless problem in our world as well as a homeless one. The houseless one is challenging to solve: it's a matter of building houses and communities that are safe and secure and where the needs of the individuals are met. It involves educational, psychological and financial resources. The homeless one is challenging to solve because there are emotional and spiritual concerns that need attention.

Our Torah is very clear when it comes to how the community is to go about building a home – based on how our ancestors acted and how they didn't act. And what our rabbis have done with those lessons over the millennia. A home must be built on a sense of justice, balance, fairness, equity. It comes with love and understanding, support and appreciation. A home is safe. It is secure.

As we dwell in our homes and houses, may we give thanks and hold all that we create dear. And may we, from whatever position we find ourselves, reach out and answer the calls in our community to build a world of justice.