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## SOME ECO-SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS ON SUKKOT

At the full harvest moon, barely five days after Yom Kippur, comes the true celebration of autumn and ingathering, Sukkot may be my favorite holiday because autumn is my favorite season, and the sukkah requires that we celebrate out-of-doors. The work of erecting and decorating this leafy-thatched little tabernacle is pure pleasure when the morning is clear and crisp. We adorn our sukkah with ornamental gourds grown from our garden, just for this purpose. We add a few pumpkins at the entrance, along with Indian corn. If we are lucky, most of our meals can be eaten around the shaded picnic table in the center of our Sukkah.

The weeklong relocation from permanent home to temporary sukkah, from concrete stability to delicate fragility, reinforces not only gratitude, but also appreciation of our ties to the earth. At the same time, I am mindful that the Torah links the Sukkah with our desert wanderings, as it is said: “You shall live in sukkot seven days? In order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in sukkot when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.” (Lev. 23:43) So the Sukkah recalls the bounty of our settled existence, and also the more meager sustenance of our unsettled existence. For the desert wandering, though sustained by manna, was a time of aloneness in the wilderness, in makeshift huts; a people still unsure of their destiny, in search of God’s law and love.

In both respects, the sukkah turns my thoughts back to God’s *hesed*, grace. Dwelling in my sukkah is as much an emotional as a physical act. For us urban-suburban dwellers, the renewed closeness to the earth is gratifying yet humbling. The desert experience reminder is inspiring yet chastening. Is the yield of our land so different from the miraculous manna? Are our four sturdy walls and everything in it, anything but improbable grace?

Source: Rabbi Barry L. Schwartz