

Our Beautiful Sukkah

Last year, we decided that our old sukkah, which had served us for many years, was no longer appropriate for the dignity of our membership. It had become worn out, shabby looking, and the materials were difficult to work with. We decided to purchase the materials for a new Sukkah. Bryan Sanders worked hard to design and construct it, and everyone who saw it remarked on the physical beauty of our new Sukkah.

The clean lines on its walls, the latticework on top, and the fresh white look adds a real dimension of brightness to the structure. But, it's important to note that halachically speaking, the walls are almost secondary to the s'chach, or "roofing" of the sukkah itself. A sukkah may have 3, 4, or more walls. The walls may be made of almost anything (I remember a friend of mine who was in the fabric business. His sukkah walls were made from a variety of fabrics, creating a most visually interesting structure).

The s'chach, on the other hand, (we recently purchased new, long-lasting s'chach) must be made from natural, organic materials (usually this means plant-based), must be detached from the ground (so, we can't use a living tree's attached branches as the roof), and, the s'chach may not be susceptible to tum'ah (ritual impurity- which means that the schach material must not have been processed into food or a utensil, or into a floor mat). It must also be permeable, so that although shade exceeds sunlight during the day, star-gazing is possible at night. All these requirements mean that we must use "kosher" s'chach.

The sukkah reminds us of the "booths" that the Jewish people used as shelter during their 40 year wandering with Moses. When we sit, and eat in them during the holiday, we actually re-enact a part of the Exodus story, much as we re-enact the Exodus during the Passover seder. And the schach can remind us of the *Ananei Ha-kavod* -the Divine Clouds of Glory - that surrounded and protected the Jews during their time in the wilderness. And, according to the Talmud, there were a variety of clouds that surrounded the people- not just the

pillar of fire at night and the cloud pillar during the day. God's protection was "all encompassing" as our ancestors moved through the wilderness.

There's another idea that the sukkah brings up. At least in the Northern Hemisphere, Jews leave the comfort of their sturdy homes to live in "huts" just as the weather begins to chill. This move may help us appreciate just how thankful we should be that we live in an environment protected from the elements, and that our move outdoors is only a week long. By the end of that week, we will have ample reason to thank God that we can live indoors, safe from the elements, even as other people may not have such luxury. And, since Sukkot occurs during the harvest season, we would do well to thank God for all the blessings we enjoy. Remember, Sukkot comes only a few days after we have stated in our High Holiday liturgy that we will attempt to come even closer to feeling God's presence this new year. Sukkot is a wonderful way of making that attempt quite real, and, indeed quite enjoyable. Come visit, and eat in, our new Sukkah !!

שלום ג' from my home to yours,
Rabbi Seth Sternstein