

Weekly Teaching

October 4, 2017

**“Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not mind me stopping here,
To watch his woods fill up with snow.”**

This familiar Robert Frost poem is short hand for our holiday of Sukkot.

Frost has caught, within his eloquence of phrase, the true meaning of our Festival of Booths.

The poem, *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, is about lingering in a borrowed, transient space.

The poem reminds the reader that you must allow each and every moment to touch you.

Sukkot, our Festival of Booths, is a holiday that speaks to temporary spaces.

Sukkot speaks to the fragility of life; the fragility of structures. Sukkot speaks to dwelling, and dwelling spaces. Our holiday reminds us of our place in the world. Our holiday reminds us of our roles as custodians of this home, our earth.

But, the verse of Frost’s poem does not only reveal the traveler that we all are in life. Frost spoke also of the host.

He wrote: “He will not mind me stopping here...”

As human beings, we are at once host, and guest, in our sacred spaces of life.

We welcome and we partake.

We linger and we leave.

And, it is within these pauses in life that we find and feel God.

Judaism has always taught: As Jews, as religious people, we must have an open door policy. Guests are always to be made welcome. And, as Jews, we know that the Sabbath and festivals are particularly worthy times to welcome people.

On our Festival of Passover, we open the door and call out, “all who are hungry come in and eat.” Later, we open the door for a second time to welcome Elijah the prophet.

Over the years, my own family has welcomed to our Seder all different types of people, with various ethnic and religious backgrounds.

And like Passover, the festival of Sukkot is particularly built around having guests. We eat our meals outside in a sukkah, a flimsy booth with branches for a roof. According to Jewish tradition, each evening as we sit down we invite a different Biblical patriarch and matriarch.

We invite: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David; Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Miriam, Deborah and Ruth.

And, as we invite our spiritual ancestors as guests, we remind ourselves of the needs of the present.

We know with our open sukkah that the key part of the celebration is a Booth filled with guests.

This is the living of our spiritual legacy; to welcome the guest into our dwelling place.

In these modern times — sadly, although reasonably — we have needed to build walls of privacy around our lives.

Part of this is security. We live in unsafe times. We require deadbolts and alarm systems. We need to guard our homes, our Temples, our communities. But, unfortunately, our reasonable need for security comes with risk.

We risk not knowing our neighbors.

We risk losing a sense of our neighborhoods and communities.

We risk losing the connections that come with a shared past.

In our need to have privacy and security, we have risked losing something valuable: the ability to have the mitzvah to open our doors and welcome guests.

And, the welcoming of guests must remain intact because it is a deep part of our sacred tradition.

Sukkot is the perfect time to rediscover and rededicate ourselves to the most ancient mitzvah, the welcoming of guests into our own lives.

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