

How many of you just *love* the holiday of Passover? Prepare for it very carefully, by cleaning out your homes, or making special food, or gathering family close for big, festive meals?

Now, before you start to wonder why I'm talking about Passover at this time of year, imagine if there were an even bigger deal holiday that occurred only 5 days before Passover? Do you think you'd still give it the same amount of attention?

This is the strange situation we are currently in. We have a magnificently important - and extremely *fun* - holiday coming up in just two days, yet every day, when Yom Kippur ends, I can't believe how much I have to scramble to get ready for Sukkot. It's a bit unfair, really, because Sukkot is really such a fabulous time.

Anyone who built a sukkah as a child - *or with* a child knows how engaging this holiday is. As much as Pesach, it invites all five our senses to participation, as we construct this great big temporary playhouse, and we wave around these foreign sticks and fruit.

And yet, Sukkot is more than just the best Jewish arts and crafts project ever. At this time of year, when we here in Eugene know the rains might start any minute, Sukkot is a special moment at the intersection of anxiety and joy.

Sukkot is the time of year when, according to midrash and to the Talmud, the earth is judged for rain. What does this mean? Well, ancient Israelite religion evolved in a climate a little drier but not unlike ours: a rainy winter season and

dry summer season. Sukkot marked the time around which the rains should begin in ancient Israel - not unlike here! And if there were some good, steady rains, shortly after Sukkot, that would be a good sign for the crops for the coming year. If there weren't rains within less than a months after Sukkot, a series of fasts would be proclaimed, described in Talmud Masechet Ta'anit, which seem to be a sort of hunger-strike against heaven, to bring down the rains.

Some of the most picturesque synagogue ritual of Sukkot stems from this anxiety. You might consider coming to synagogue on Sukkot, and experiencing the power of the "hoshanot" - we'll walk in a circle with the Torah, holding our lulavim and etrogim, repeating "Hoshana" which means "save us" over and over again. Historically, that exhortation wasn't about any kind of metaphysical salvation, but about sending the rain. On Hoshanah Rabbah, literally, the "great big Save us!" the seventh day of Sukkot, Jews all over the world beat willow branches on the floor, in a literal physical effort to bring rain down from heaven.

We don't know if it will come. Sukkot comes in this time of uncertainty, when the harvest is gathered, and we are grateful for it. Yom Kippur is over; we have survived, and we are grateful for it. *But* the rains aren't exactly late *yet* but it's getting close to time, so we're not quite sure if they'll show up.

That sense of uncertainty is built into the practice of this holiday in other ways. We will read in Leviticus 23:42-3on the first day of Sukkot: You must dwell in booths seven days; all the native citizens of Israel shall dwell in booths; so that your generations may know that I caused the children of Israel to dwell in booths,

when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. This is about connecting with vulnerability. The specific injunction that the citizen must dwell in the booths I see as less a way of segregating between citizens and foreigners, and more an illustration of the goal of this practice. The foreigner knows what it feels like to wander, to be vulnerable. The citizen, comfortably situated in his or her home and community, needs the yearly experience of dwelling in a fragile hut, in order to simulate an emotional experience that otherwise she might never face.

We are supposed to be a little bit disquieted. If the experience of sitting in the sukkah is a little chilly, a little uncomfortably dark, that's okay. There is spiritual work to be done in the dark and the cold - the work of facing our own vulnerability; of realizing how thin the walls that separate us from dark and cold all.

But on the other hand, we are not supposed to be miserable. The other mitzvah of Sukkot that is considered the most important, we'll read a week later, on Shmini Atzeret: ושמחת בחגך והיית אך שמח. From Deuteronomy, Chapter 16, verses 14 and 15: You shall rejoice in your holiday; you shall be completely joyful. From this the rabbis deduce, that if it is too cold or too rainy to be joyful in the Sukkah, then one should go inside.

The commandment of joy actually overrides the commandment of sitting in the sukkah. And the commandment of joy explicitly includes everyone, as it says in verse 14: you, your son, your daughter, your male and female servants, the Levite, and the stranger, the orphan and the widow; everyone within your gates. While

only the citizen (and the rabbis when they codified Jewish law deduced that this meant adult, male Jews) were required to dwell in the sukkah, everyone was to be gathered into the joyful feasting.

Uncertainty and joy. I'm struck by the implications of this practice. Perhaps we can only have a joyful feast that is accessible to everyone, when the most comfortable, the most privileged, are willing to step outside of their comfort, are willing to sit in a fragile hut on a chilly night under stars, and to remember that we are all descended from vulnerable wandering ancestors. On Yom Kippur morning, Reuben Zahler reminded us that more than guilt, we need gratitude to motivate us to respond compassionately to the refugee crisis. What if for every day of Sukkot, we spent some time in a sukkah, and truly marveled at what an amazing thing it is to have a home? What might we do with that uncertainty?

I hope that each of us takes the opportunity to do some the Sukkot practices during the coming week-long holiday. May we have fortitude to withstand getting slightly chilly, or slightly damp. And may we feel great gratitude and joy.

Shabbat shalom and chag sameach.