

SUKKOT

The sukkah is a strange kind of shelter. Built with temporary walls and a roof of branches that lets in both sunlight and rain, it fails every modern standard of security. And yet, on Sukkot, we are commanded to leave our sturdy homes and dwell in this fragile hut for seven days. This radical ritual is not just about historical memory—it is a spiritual and political act that reminds us of a truth we often resist: that no human security is absolute.

In our everyday lives, we surround ourselves with layers of protection—locked doors, insurance policies, national borders. These structures create the illusion of permanence and control. But Sukkot punctures that illusion. It asks us to imagine, even temporarily, what it means to be exposed: to weather, to instability, to forces beyond our control. It is not just a reenactment of the Israelites' journey through the wilderness—it is an invitation to empathy with all those today who live without reliable shelter or safety.

When we sit in the sukkah, we are meant to remember that our comfort is not guaranteed—and neither is anyone else's. The commandment is not just about humbling the powerful, but about sensitizing us to the precariousness of others. Millions around the world, including in our own communities, live every day in a state of displacement or insecurity: refugees, people experiencing homelessness, those facing eviction, those fleeing violence or climate disaster, those targeted by rising hate and extremism. The sukkah turns our attention outward—asking us to see in its open walls the stories of those whose “temporary shelter” is not by choice.

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In a democratic society, where the health of the whole depends on how we care for the most vulnerable, the sukkah becomes a powerful symbol. It teaches that true security cannot be built for some while it is denied to others. It calls us to a politics of compassion, one that prioritizes housing, equity, safety, and the dignity of all. Sukkot reminds us that justice work is not optional; it is the very fulfillment of the festival's message. Only when we recognize the fragility of our own structures can we begin to build a society rooted not in fear, but in shared responsibility.

As the wind blows through the sukkah and the stars become visible above, we are asked to hold a paradox: that in vulnerability there is strength, and in impermanence, truth. The sukkah may be temporary, but the awareness it cultivates should stay with us all year long.