

## Be a Sukkah

Last month, we all saw the images of devastation in the wake of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, and the earthquakes in Mexico. As I write this, aid workers are only now reaching the interior of Puerto Rico to bring water, food and medicine and to assess the damage.

Now we are ready to celebrate Sukkot. Remember that a sukkah is a temporary shelter, designed to be fairly easy to erect, something that a strong wind could blow down or even carry away.

It is essential that a sukkah not have a solid roof. Rather, it is overlaid with branches in such a way that one can see through it to the sun and the stars.

Although, like Pesach and Shavuot, Sukkot's origin lies with the agricultural cycle in ancient (and modern!) Israel, it is the added historical significance that I'm thinking about now. We remember that when our ancestors spent forty years in the desert, between Egyptian slavery and Canaan, they did not build permanent homes. Rather, they lived in sukkot. The partially open roofs reminded them, and us, of God's concern for us in all our vulnerability and fragility.

It is natural to see the destroyed homes in the Florida Keys or the pancaked apartment buildings in Mexico City and wonder where God was when so many lives were upset and even ended. Of course, one can ask the same question about any natural disaster.

If you believe that our world is such that God can and will save everyone from suffering, loss and sorrow, that's a good question—and it is hard to find a good answer. But if you believe that it is up to us human beings to embody the attributes that we ascribe to God, the answer is clear.

Where shelter is inadequate or absent; when food and water are scarce; when there are too few doctors or nurses; when communication is disrupted—we must become the sukkot. Fragile and vulnerable as we are, it is up to us to aid and shelter those who have been stricken.

It has often been said that we are God's hands in the world. Opportunities for acting as such abound; they are all around us, continually. Perhaps dailyness blinds us to need. But when we see images like those coming from the Gulf, the Caribbean and Mexico, our sensibilities are heightened.

So: be a sukkah! Contribute to aid for the victims of natural disasters. If you have skills to offer, do so.

Our holy days, one by one, elevate sacred themes to consciousness; but we must not forget that these themes, like shelter and care, flow throughout the year. Sukkot is now; Sukkot is ongoing.

AND don't forget to fill a bag for the Squirrel Hill Food Pantry. What better season to help those who cannot afford to feed themselves and their families? Out of our human weakness, let there be strength! Chag sameach!

**Rabbi Paul Tuchman**