

I want to take a moment to acknowledge the TBI brotherhood, who got together on Tuesday this week to put up our Sukkah. This is something they do every year, but it was particularly impressive this year, because the sukkah toppled over due to high wind and rain on Tuesday evening, so they gathered again to put it up again, resecuring it even more thoroughly than the first time.

All of which made me think of a very relevant conversation in the Talmud in Masechet Sukkah, page 23a, where the rabbis argue about whether a Sukkah is kosher if an especially strong wind can blow down its walls. All of the rabbis agree that a Sukkah needs to be strong enough to withstand what they call “a typical land wind.” But the point of contention is between Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Akiva. **“Rabban Gamliel holds: For a *sukka*, we require a permanent residence, and since it is not able to withstand a typical sea wind, it is nothing – ie. not a *sukka* at all. Rabbi Akiva holds: For a *sukka*, we require a temporary residence, and since it is able to withstand a typical land wind, it is fit.”** In Rabbi Akiva’s estimation, a Sukkah that cannot withstand a typical sea wind, or an atypical land wind is fine.

Ultimately, both the halacha as formulated by Maimonides in the Mishneh Torah and by Rabbi Yosef Caro in the Shulchan Aruch agree with Rabbi Akiva: A sukkah has to be strong enough to not be constantly blown over by a typical wind, but not so strong that a “sea wind” wouldn’t blow it over. Given that Sukkot hadn’t started, it still good that the Brotherhood rebuilt the Sukkah, but the fact that an extraordinarily windy evening blew it over should be no negative reflection on their Sukkah building skill!

As we can see, though, the disagreement about how sturdy a Sukkah has to be stems from a disagreement about whether a Sukkah is a permanent or temporary dwelling. Since Rabbi Akiva's position, that a Sukkah is temporary, wins, despite the fact that in Sukkah 27a, the rabbis do claim that we are supposed to relate to the Sukkah as we would our permanent dwelling, eating in it and sleeping in it. And perhaps this interplay between stability and impermanence is the whole point. Perhaps there is something holy about being in a space where you sort of feel comfortable, but where a particularly strong wind can knock over everything. Most of the time, those of us fortunate enough to have homes and live in places that are at least currently politically, economically and ecologically stable can imagine that our situation is permanent. But the permanence of that stability is an illusion. The idea of this Sukkah, strong enough to withstand a typical wind, but susceptible to demolition by anything larger, reminds us that our lives, our stability, our homes are all finite, and invites us to find joy within the vulnerability of impermanence.

Rabbi Lisa Grant wrote this week, "The festival of Sukkot offers us rich resources for living this duality, and the spiritual strength to work for change without giving in to despair. There are so many themes in the holiday that connect us to nature, that remind us of the interconnectivity of the universe and of the randomness, futility, and fragility of life. We are instructed to be "only joyful" ([Deuteronomy 16:15](#)) and at the same time we pray the *Hoshanot*, pleading to God again and again, "Save us, save us."¹

¹ https://truah.org/resources/lisa-grant-sukkot-moraltorah_2023/

Certainly, the last few summers of wildfire season in Oregon have swept away the illusion of ecological stability here. The last few years of political discourse have challenged the illusion of political stability. Increasing inflation in the past year has reminded us not to count on economic stability either. As much as we might understandably mourn our lost sense of security, if we ever felt secure, I know that I at least treasured the rains that began in the last few weeks, much as I don't particularly love bicycling around cold and wet - because I did not take for granted that the rains would come, and I've experienced wildfire smoke in October when the rains *don't* come.

Rabbi Grant suggests that this interplay might give us the spiritual strength to face the demands of climate change, and I am reminded of Cameron Hubbe's words to us on Yom Kippur, "Some things get to get better even as some other things get harder. We get to get better, the connections between us."

I think she's right – an awareness of our vulnerability can make us anxious, but it can also push us to be more grateful, and it can push us to get together. That's why we're hosting so many events in the TBI Sukkah this week, and that's why I am hosting an open Sukkah at my home for a few hours on Sunday. As my friend Rabbi Micah Weiss has written, "My experience with Sukkot is that I rarely make a solo choice of embracing discomfort. If I'm with friends, I'm more likely to stay in the sukkah when it starts to rain because we decide together to put on raincoats and enjoy getting a little wet. I rarely sleep in a sukkah alone, but I'm always down to sleep out when folks invite me to bring a sleeping bag and camp in the sukkah together. . .

“Our comfort zones and positionalities are calibrated differently. Each of our growth through discomfort will look different at different times, but there is much to be learned from one another’s examples.”²

We may not all wind up actually sleeping in a Sukkah over the course of this holiday. But I encourage us to spend sometimes outdoors, not just get exercise or walking somewhere, but just *being*, whether we’re under a sukkah or somewhere else, even if the weather isn’t what we’d call perfect. And that’s also why we’re hosting the Climate Ribbon project through Sukkot. At some point during this holiday, I encourage you to think about something you love that is – again – vulnerable to climate change, and to write it down on one of the ribbons so that others can help hold that sense of vulnerability together.

Our Sukkah may blow over again. It is the nature of things to break, and fall. This life is fragile. All we can do is do our best to ballast it, and then to enjoy what we have while we have it, mindful that temporary dwellings are, in the end, all that we truly have.

² <https://truah.org/resources/micah-geurin-weiss-sukkot-moraltorah/>