



THE HOUSE ON THE ROOF

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When a landlady objects to a sukkah on the roof of her building, how will her tenant celebrate Sukkot? The judge comes up with solution that works for everyone.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Sukkot

Sukkot, often called the Feast of Tabernacles or the Festival of Booths, is a harvest holiday that arrives right after the Jewish High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It is customary to mark the holiday by erecting a sukkah, a three-sided booth (the Hebrew word “sukkot” is the plural of “sukkah”). For eight days (seven in Israel), people come together to eat, socialize, sing, and sometimes even sleep in their sukkah.

A sukkah is meant to be temporary, only standing for the eight days of the holiday, reminding us of the temporary dwellings nomadic Israelites lived in during the harvests of ancient times. It should be built outdoors (a rooftop works, as this story attests!), and the top should be covered with s’kach – branches or other greenery. The s’kach should provide some cover from the sun during the day, but also allow one to see the stars shining through it at night. Decorating a sukkah can be great fun – people often hang lights, paper chains or streamers, and fruits of the local harvest. But the most fun of all is welcoming families and friends into the sukkah for meals, board games, sing-alongs, or just hanging out. It’s a holiday the entire family can enjoy together! Chag Sukkot Sameach (Happy Sukkot)!

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Hachnasat Orchim

Hachnasat orchim, which in English is the value of welcoming guests into one’s home, is an ancient and fundamental Jewish value. The earliest references to this value are found in chapter 18 of the Biblical book of Genesis, when the patriarch Abraham welcomed three strangers into his tent, offering them food, water, and shelter. From that moment forward, the standard for Jewish hospitality had been set! The holiday of Sukkot lends itself well to living out the value of hachnasat orchim, as a sukkah is designed to be inviting to people. A sukkah must have at least three sides, and many people intentionally leave the fourth side open so that more guests can flow in and out. It is traditional to perform a short ceremony called the *ushpizin* (Aramaic for “guests”), in which one also “invites” Biblical patriarchs and matriarchs, including Abraham himself, into the sukkah.

In this story, the gentleman wanted to create a welcoming sukkah in spite of his grumpy landlord. Welcoming friends is easy, but what about when people are more difficult? Take a moment to talk with your children about the challenges and rewards of hachnasat orchim. Learning how to be welcoming to everyone is a lifelong project.