

**Hag Sameach and Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold**

Candle Lighting Time
Fri. Evening 6:56 pm
Sat. Evening 7:47 pm (from pre-existing flame)

Sukkot Festival Service Schedule

Sat. Sept. 26 9:30 am 1st Day Sukkot (followed by deli lunch in Sukkah for those with reservations)
Sun. Sept. 27 9:30 am 2nd Day Sukkot

Sat. Oct. 3 9:30 am Shmini Atzeret, Read Ecclesiastes, Yizkor
6 pm Mincha, Simchat Torah Celebration
Sun. Oct. 4 9:30 am, Simchat Torah Celebration

Happy Sukkot (the feast of tabernacles). We are obligated to be joyous on the festival. Below is the message I sent out to my congregation this week. Here is a link for my High Holiday sermons this year. [High Holiday Sermons](#)

**SUKKOT
FROM THE SPIRITUAL TO THE MATERIAL WORLD**

“You shall dwell in booths seven days; all who are Israelites born shall dwell in booths.”
(Leviticus 23:42)

One of my favorite stories is about the woman from Brooklyn who travels all the way to India to see the guru. She takes a bus to a village high in the Himalayas and finally arrives at the temple. But the gatekeeper says, “The guru cannot see you. He is meditating.” She responds, “I will wait.” After several days, the gatekeeper says, “The guru will see you now.” She is led into a room and sees a man in a long robe sitting on the carpet, the smell of incense filling the room. She looks at him for a moment and then says, “Sheldon, come home.”

This story hits home because so many Jews seem to be attracted to the ancient spiritual disciplines of the East. Chabad says the biggest Passover seder it sponsors each year is in Katmandu, Nepal, for hundreds of Israelis and other Jews who have made their way to the high Himalayan city. Many Jews love the idea of leaving the material world of our daily lives to connect with some higher spiritual reality. Many Eastern religious traditions teach that the physical world is not real – they use the term *maya*. Reality exists on some higher dimension that we can reach

through meditation and various ascetic practices. These ascetic practices often include fasting, celibacy, and giving up the material pleasures of the world.

Judaism experiences something similar, at least for the 25 hours of Yom Kippur. For one day there is no work, no eating, no drinking, no sexual relations, no bathing, no anointing with oil or perfume, no wearing comfortable shoes. During the holiest day of our year we become like angels, leaving the material world and entering a spiritual dimension. On a personal level, at no time do I feel more spiritual than during Neilah, at the end of Yom Kippur, after fasting since the night before, standing before the Torahs dressed in white in the open ark. But after the shofar is blown, I leave that spiritual high to reenter this material world. I break my fast. Muslims on Ramadan usually break the fast with a fig. I prefer a glass of orange juice.

Exactly five days after our most spiritual holy day, we begin our most material festival. We enter the world of nature. We leave our homes to eat in a temporary hut (sukkah) with branches on the roof. Some pious Jews even sleep in the sukkah. We hold four species – a palm branch, a citron, willow branches, and myrtle branches, and wave them in every direction. We also march around the synagogue with them. On the seventh day we beat five willow branches, watching the leaves fall off like tears. On Sukkot we have left the spiritual world to reenter the physical world. That is where we belong, since we are both spiritual beings and physical beings. According to the Torah, we are made of the breath of God (the spiritual) and the dust of the earth (the physical).

There were many ancient religious traditions that denigrated the physical, material world. Plato taught that the material world was created by a demiurge or inferior being, is filled with decay, and is a pale reflection of a perfect World of the Forms. Gnosticism, which became a heresy in Christianity, taught that the world was not created by God but by some lesser being. It is made up of matter, inferior to the spirit. The great philosopher Plotinus, in a philosophy known as Neoplatonism, taught that our souls are trapped in this physical world and must escape to a better spiritual place. These ideas have been influential in the West. For example, one often hears the phrase “sins of the flesh” which denigrates our natural urges.

Perhaps the message of Sukkot is that life is not lived in a perfect spiritual world. It is lived in the messy, painful, physical world into which we have been born. Yom Kippur lasts one day. Sukkot lasts seven days, with an extra day (in Israel) or two extra days (outside Israel) tacked onto the end. Sukkot is called *z'man simchateinu*, “the time of our joy.” It is about the joy of being alive in this material world. For after all, God looked out at this world and saw that “it was good.”