

# Balance

If you follow the holiday of Sukkot, it will lead you to the great outdoors. By participating in its central ritual of spending time in a primitive leafy hut, you have no choice but to feel on your face the autumn wind blowing through the open door and squint at the sun shining in between the branches that constitute the roof. When my family and I built a sukkah at our own University City house last year, the project turned into a festive block party—neighbors of all religions, cultures and races spent the a good part of the day building the structure, foraging for natural decorations, singing and drumming while sitting on the lawn, and generally enjoying the healthy sensation of being outside for an extended period of time. Everbody did just fine without the increasingly seductive comforts of home-TV, computer, microwave, Wii, etc.

Sukkahs are built to symbolize both the temporary shelters our ancestors lived in as they gathered the produce of the fall harvest and the tents that we imagine were used in the story we tell and re-tell of the runaway Hebrew slaves and their trek through the desert wilderness. In both settings, I imagine these human-made dwelling places were dwarfed by the awe-inspiring natural world. Nowadays, of course, the opposite is true. Sociologists are beginning to write about 'nature deficit disorder,' a variety of physical and social problems that stem from a lack of exposure to spaces where the natural elements aren't crowded out by human development.

I will never forget the first time I took Rodney, an inner-city teenager that I mentor, into rural Missouri for the first time to horseback ride and just sit by a river—tension visibly left his face and he felt expansive enough to speak to me for the first time in conceptual terms about his hopes and dreams. I also am thinking now about our wonderful member Dr. Eddie Berg, z'l", whose recent memorial service was filled with inspiring stories of his often far from comfortable sounding adventures in parts of the world still unspoiled (often as he served the medical needs of underserved populations), experiences that helped shape his uncommon perspective and wisdom.

There are plenty of opportunities to venture outside and immerse yourself in nature with CRC during Sukkot (October 13-20). Visit our sukkah and shake the lulav to the four winds, join me for our overnight congregational retreat at Camp Wyman on the 17th, and/or travel with us to the Confluence State Park on Sunday the 19th for a special earth-based holiday ceremony at the intersection of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. Together we will feed ourselves on nature's 'four food groups' (earth, air, water and fire), and return to our roots as a people who know how to balance what we must create with what was created wild long before us.

*B'ahavah, Rabbi Randy*

