

Sukkot
Imagining the Impossible
Rabba Sara Hurwitz - President and Co-Founder

My family lives in an apartment, and eating in a sukkah is always a struggle. But thanks to the kindness of our community and friends the chag has always been special and festive as we enjoy other people's sukkahs. This year, with social distancing restrictions and the health of our community as the primary focus, I am facing the stark reality that eating in a sukkah for every meal- beyond the minimum of kiddush and hamotzi - may not be in the cards.

I feel a bit empty, but there are some halakhic principles related to the construction of the sukkah that resonate with me and are helping me get comfortable with experiencing the chag a bit differently this year.

The laws of building sukkot are intricate- chazal imagined every scenario for the kinds of sukkot people would have to build.

Perhaps, I would like to think, they even predicted that a sukka might have to be built during a pandemic necessitating as many open walls as possible! And so, key to this year's sukkot are the leniency around open spaces that are imagined as actual walls.

For example- there's the concept of Gud asik, if a sukkah's walls are 10 *tephachim* high, or about 40 inches, it is as if the wall is complete. The empty space is meant to be imagined as a wall that reaches up to the sechach.

And then, there's the concept of Lavud, a halakhic idea where two walls that are within three tefachim (or about nine and half inches) are considered as if they are connected. Once again, the empty space is imagined as a solid wall.

The rabbis ask us to look into an abyss, and imagine it as complete and whole.

There is a story told about a thief who once took advantage of one of these open spaces in a sukkah wall; he reached in and stole a silver Kiddush cup. The incident was brought to Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky, the Rav in Lithuania at the beginning of the 20th century. He jokingly remarked that the thief must have been an am

ha'aretz (ignoramus): “A talmida chachama (Torah scholar) could never have done such a thing.

Knowing the *din of lavud*- that the space is imagined as completely solid- he would never have put his hand through the wall!”

This is the Torah that I need going into this sukkot: permission to look into an open space, and imagine an entire world within it. To look into something that’s literally not there, but imagine that it is actually whole and complete. To see that which is missing, as if it is there.

These halakhic concepts are giving me permission to dream- to imagine the holes and emptiness that I sometimes feel not as loss, but as possibility. To look into a dark abyss and actually imagine light and life and hope.

So I will try, on this sukkot to see what is not there yet, but may soon come to fruition.

Chag Sameach



Rabba Sara Hurwitz, Co-Founder and President of Maharat, the first institution to ordain Orthodox women as clergy, also serves on the Rabbinic staff at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

Rabba Hurwitz completed Drisha’s three-year Scholars Circle Program, an advanced intensive program of study for Jewish women training to become scholars, educators and community leaders. After another five years of study under the auspices of Rabbi Avi Weiss, she was ordained by Rabbi Weiss and Rabbi Daniel Sperber in 2009.

In 2013 Rabba Hurwitz was awarded the Hadassah Foundation Bernice S. Tannenbaum prize, and the Myrtle Wreath Award from the Southern New Jersey Region of Hadassah in 2014. In 2016 she was the Trailblazer Award Recipient at UJA Federation of New York. She was named as one of Jewish Week’s 36 Under 36, the Forward50 most influential Jewish leaders, and Newsweek’s 50 most influential rabbis. In 2017 Rabba Hurwitz was chosen to be a member of the inaugural class of Wexner Foundation Field Fellows.

She and husband, Josh Abraham, are parents to Yonah, Zacharya, Davidi and Natan.