

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Sukkot is a Hug from Above

By Yonatan Hamburger and Tzali Reicher

What Christians call the Feast of the Booths is known to Jews as the festival of Sukkot, which Jewish communities are now celebrating. It is part of the "Season of Joy," which calls upon us to embrace a unique spiritual energy — one that invites Jewish people to step out of their usual boundaries and enter a place where profound joy and faith intermingles.

For one week, they move their meals and daily living into an outdoor, fragile, and temporary structure called the sukkah, leaving behind the solidity and permanence of their homes. For seven days, they eat, drink, study, and socialize in this hut, under a roof made of branches through which one must be able to see the sky. Why? Because Sukkot is about plugging into a deeper truth that, if truly internalized, can transform how we see the world and ourselves.

The sukkah teaches that joy is not found in physical stability or material wealth. Instead, real joy comes from trust in the One above, who shelters us even when the structures of our life seem frail. Consider the ancient Israelites in the desert, wandering for 40 years without homes, without certainty. They had no visible means of support, yet they thrived for decades under the miraculous Clouds of Glory that surrounded them, a testament to divine protection that did not falter. Sukkahs today symbolize those clouds. When one sits inside, they're meant to feel not only sheltered but embraced by the very same divine presence that guided their ancestors.

Sukkot teaches each of us to embrace simple faith. We step outside our homes, abandoning the comforts we are so accustomed to, and embrace a simpler existence stripped of the material things that define us for the other 51 weeks of the year. Despite the bare walls and minimal furnishings, there is a joy that fills the sukkah, a sense of satisfaction that defies logic. It's a joy of realization, that we don't need all that stuff to make us happy. It's liberating to realize how little we truly need to feel content. The sukkah helps us refocus on what matters most — family, friends, faith. All those distractions we thought we couldn't live without suddenly seem trivial.

When we look up through the roof of our sukkah and see the stars, we can feel small, exposed to the elements, and unsure of what the future holds. But as the sukkah envelops us, it reminds us that even in life's uncertainty, there is security in our connection to something higher, a force that always provides and sustains His children.

And as we sit in the sukkah, we're not alone. Sukkot comes with an age-old tradition of inviting spiritual guests and departed chassidic masters, known as the ushpizin, into our sukkah. Each night, we symbolically welcome one of seven exalted souls: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David. These guests are our forefathers, who paved the way for us with acts of extraordinary faith and kindness. Their presence is not just ceremonial. It's a reminder that we carry their legacy with us. When we invite them in, we're connecting ourselves to the greatness we come from, drawing strength and inspiration from their lives. Sukkot becomes a time to reflect on the lineage of spiritual giants whose courage and devotion have shaped our people's story.

Yet, despite the grandeur of these guests, the sukkah remains modest in height. A sukkah that is too tall, higher than about 30 feet, is disqualified because it becomes a structure of its own, detached from the earthiness and humility that define it. The message is clear: spiritual greatness is not achieved by elevating oneself above others but by staying grounded and humble. True strength comes from bending low to lift others up. The sukkah's low walls call out, "Make space for others." When we're too full of ourselves, there's no room left for the Divine.

This humility is exemplified in a simple image: a hug. Jewish law states that a sukkah must have at least two complete walls and a small, partial third wall — just enough to symbolize an arm's embrace. The sages teach that this shape is reminiscent of a person wrapping their arms around another in a loving hug. Sukkot, therefore, is more than just a dwelling. It's an embrace from above. The sukkah surrounds us, not with grandiosity or power, but with warmth and closeness. It's God's way of saying, "I am with you, no matter where you are or what you've been through."

This embrace is unconditional. No matter how flawed we think we are or how distant we feel, Sukkot assures us that we are welcomed as we are. The sukkah doesn't discriminate. It is open to anyone who seeks to step inside. Its message is one of acceptance and love. Step into the sukkah, and feel yourself enveloped in a divine hug that asks for nothing in return.

Sukkot is more than a ritual. It's an experience meant to reset our priorities and remind us of the truth that, ultimately, our lives are but temporary dwellings. What remains eternal is the joy, faith, and connection we cultivate within our fragile walls. So, as we sit in our sukkahs this year, let us feel the joy that comes from letting go of our illusions of control, the liberation of needing less, and the comfort of knowing that no matter how stormy life becomes, we are forever sheltered by a love that transcends the physical. Sukkot invites us to leave behind the chaos and bask in the calm, where the walls may be flimsy, but the spirit is unshakable.

Yonatan Hamburger is a rabbi and writer serving spiritual seekers of all persuasions on behalf of Chabad of Rural Georgia. Tzali Reicher is a rabbi and writer serving communities throughout the regional South. You can reach them at y@tasteof Torah.org.

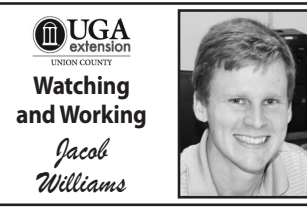


Echos from Sinai
"Torah for Everyone"
Rabbi Yonatan Hamburger



A Time to Plant

Fall brings a change in the weather and the growing season slows down. A lot of people will put their gardens up for the winter, but there are still some tasks that are better done when temperatures are down. Lower temperatures means less water loss from plants. This makes it an ideal time to start putting perennials in the ground.



UGA extension
Watching and Working
Jacob Williams

Trees that have been grown in a pot or are balled and burlapped that have a well-developed root system can be planted at any time of year. However, the ideal time of year to plant them is in the fall. This is because the top portion of the plant has gone dormant and temperatures are lower, which means the tree will lose less water to evapotranspiration. During this time the roots below ground are still active. That means they will still be growing through fall and the winter. This gives you a more established plant come summer time. It also means that planting in the fall results in you spending less time watering your new plants.

Some of the most common issues when planting new trees is planting too deep, planting too shallow, and over watering.

If you are planting in a poorly drained soil creating a raised bed will help improve drainage. Raise the soil level 8-12 inches using native soil. Plantings at new construction sites may need an addition of organic matter to improve soil health. You will also need to till deeply around the planting site to alleviate soil compaction.

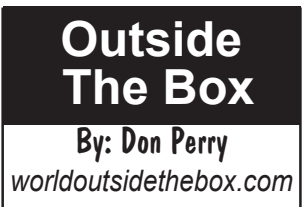
The hole that is dug should be 2-3x wider than the size of the root ball. If you are planting into a well-drained soil the depth of the hole should be the same as the height of the root ball. In a poorly drained soil the depth of the hole should be 2-4 inches less than the height of the root ball, then build up the surrounding soil to be level with the root ball. Planting a tree too deep leads to poor drainage and not enough oxygen getting to the roots. Planting a tree too shallow leads to the tree roots drying out too quickly.

Once you have placed the tree in the hole refill the hole. You want to mostly use native soil. Break up any clods and remove stones. You can add compost to the hole, but don't put more than 20% compost in the hole. Tamp the soil down with your foot and construct a 3-inch-high ring around the edge of the root ball to hold water. Apply 2-4 inches of mulch over the planted area. Do not put mulch up against the trunk of the tree, as this leads to rot. For the first few months after planting you want to maintain constant soil moisture in the root ball. The soil does not need to be saturated, but there should be water available to the roots.

If you have questions about tree planting contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Fair Winds and Following Seas

In the face of Nature's overwhelming power to transform and destroy, if we are not humbled by the frailty and impermanence of all that we build and plan—our organizations, economies, heritage and traditions, our dreams and aspirations, indeed our very lives and all that we hold dear—then we are blinded by the same pride that covered Ozymandias with sand.



Beyond this thin habitable skin of a tiny planet in a remote corner of a modest galaxy floating in an eddy of relative calm in the vastness of the engines of the Creator, are powers beyond our imagination. The sky last night was colored by our sun's minor indigestion, a hint at its ability to quickly end all that we do that is dependent on electrical power. Yet we shake our fists at the sky, we tiny beings who cannot even stand the weather.

Our hearts go out, but more importantly, our helping hands to the tens of thousands uprooted in this season of devastation. The road to recovery itself must first be rebuilt before it can be traveled, and long after those peddlers of the sensational, shocking, and lurid have directed our attentions to the next voyeuristic opportunities, the rebuilding will continue.

We turn now, not away from those in need but toward the people and the things that make our lives precious. We embrace them in gratitude.

On a warm, sunny day after the hurricanes had passed, when the air was still and the melodic stridulation of our autumn symphony soothed this little corner of the world, our friends the hummingbirds departed on their epic journey south.

They stayed close during long days of rain and wind, and we kept the feeders full. When the sun reappeared, they feasted on tiny insects in the meadow and the remaining few blossoms that survived the storm. They ceased their aerial jousting while they focused on consuming as many calories as possible. Far to the south, another hurricane crossed their migratory path while they lingered.

Science says that hummingbirds schedule their migration based on day length, weather conditions, and food availability, but science admits it lacks a full understanding of all the factors which influence those decisions. Days before the weather forecast predicted our first frost, and after all the storms had passed, our valiant little friends began their journey into fair winds and following seas.

We have been honored on several occasions to bear witness to the departing ritual of these tiny wonders. There are always one or two who are more comfortable in our presence, who feed undisturbed just a few feet away when we sit on the front porch, the little girl with the upturned tail feathers, the little boy with the brightest ruby ring. I remember one October day when a little companion circled the house pausing at each window until he found us in the kitchen. There he hovered for a moment looking in, and then rapidly ascended in a vertical arc, gone until spring. Let me tell you, that hover-and-swoop pulls at your heartstrings.

"His eye is on the sparrow," says the old hymn, and the perfect timing of that journey south against all odds reminds us that we are not alone, and that chaos is not the dominant force in the universe. Therein lies our hope for the communities being rebuilt by faith and the kindest, best aspects of humanity.

Guest Columns

From time to time, people in the community have a grand slant on an issue that would make a great guest editorial. Those who feel they have an issue of great importance should call our editor and talk with him about the idea. Others have a strong opinion after reading one of the many columns that appear throughout the paper.

If so, please write. Please remember that publication of submitted editorials is not guaranteed.

Towns County Community Calendar

First Monday of each month:	School Board... HS/MS Media Center	6:45 pm
Every Tuesday:	Storytime for Children... TC Library	10:30 am
First Tuesday of each month:	Hiaw. City Council... City Hall	6 pm
	YH City Council... YH City Hall	6:30 pm
Second Wednesday of each month:	Board of Elections... Elections Office	4 pm
Third Monday of each month:	Planning Commission... Temporary Courthouse	6 pm
Third Tuesday of each month:	Commissioner's Mtg... Courthouse	5:30 pm
	City of Young Harris Planning Commission...	
	Meeting Room in City Hall	5 pm
	TC Water Authority Board Meeting	6 pm

Letters To The Editor

Before It's Too Late

Dear Editor,

It has been noted that time flies when you're having fun. In fact, time flies whether you're having fun or not.

I recently looked through a box of photos that had belonged to my parents. I quickly recognized that many people had been a part of their lives that I didn't know. Realizing the importance of my discovery, I marked the back of all the photos I identified with so my children would not have the same dilemma. I noted kinship, or whatever was applicable to each photo.

If you're fortunate enough to have parents and grandparents still living, take some time and talk to them about their lives. Ask them to tell you about their childhood, their school days, favorite games they used to play, the pets they had or the name of their favorite teacher. Ask questions about memories that usually get lost in the passing of time. Any veterans in your family? Ask them to share things they feel comfortable sharing with you regarding their service to our country. Be sure and thank them for their service. You will be amazed how easily the past memories of someone will spill out, simply by being asked about them.

Time stands still for no one, so take a little bit of time and reminisce with those you love. It will be a memorable experience for everyone.

Gene Vickers

Voting Does Count

Dear Editor,

If you are looking for a prince, a queen or a president to come to America's aid, then you are barking up on the wrong tree. A tree stands firm and tall and endures great hardship from the storms that batter its looming trunk, yet remains grounded ready for the next battle with the winds of nature. Tree branches sway back and forward to warn their counterpart to dig in for the long siege that comes without notice as they work together in unity to be a reminder of what kind of leadership we need for our nation. Men and women will always disappoint us, for they fall short of what they promise on the campaign trail.

As for me I would love for Jesus Christ to step out of His Holy realm and take over the White House and fill it with His majestic mercies, grace and love. Yes, that would be lovely, but we know by Scripture that when Jesus does come back as King Jesus, He will make everything right. The evilness of this world will be dealt with, and at the end of this age into eternity Christ will be our last ruler over His people. So, take heart, you followers of Christ, for your redemption draws nigh. In the meanwhile, how do we react to this upcoming election? Do we just sit home in our recliners and count our lucky stars and let the enemy of doubt drown out our voice, or do we go and stand in the gap like the mighty tree that is mentioned above? Read what policies best suit us as a nation from each party represented. This could be the last time to vote if the wrong party wins, and if you don't vote, don't complain if you lose all your freedoms that millions have died for. Time to stand tall when the wind of adversity comes with a vengeance. Vote — Vote — Vote — from your heart, not your head.

Frank F. Combs

Fair Share?

Dear Editor,

We hear a lot these days about "fair share" and particularly how the wealthy are not paying theirs. Out of curiosity, I looked up government statistics and found this: The top 10% of wage earners in the U.S. provide 75% of the tax revenue the government receives. That means the other 90% of us contribute 25% of government's tax receipts. Let that sink in. Perhaps the government needs to curb its spending rather than punish the top wage earners with higher taxes.

Carol McKechnie

Towns County Herald

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Phone: (706) 896-4454 **Fax:** (706) 896-1745 **Email:** tcherald@windstream.net
Or mail to: PO Box 365, Hiawasse, GA 30546