

Sukkot Day 2

When I was growing up, one of the ways we would gossip about another person was to call them insecure. “Do you see how that person behaves in such and such a way. That’s because he’s insecure.” Even in middle school, we reveled in this pop psychology. Something about the concept of insecurity spoke to the adolescents that we were. The charge of insecurity hasn’t lost much of its charm since then. When we see someone behaving in a particularly egregious way that appears to compensate for some perceived lack we label them insecure.

For the holiday of Sukkot, however, insecurity is one of the primary themes. Not the kind of insecurity that is actually dangerous to a person, but a little insecurity that enables a person to acknowledge that we don’t have full control over the world.

The feeling of insecurity is instantiated in the symbol of the sukkah. Because it is susceptible to the elements, particularly of wind and rain, we feel a little taste of insecurity when we dwell in the sukkah, and that’s good.

So much of our world is about building up security. Think about insurance. We buy insurance for everything – for cars, houses, health, life, plane tickets, and manifold other features of life. Insurance is a way of providing security, of guarding against risk. There’s nothing wrong with that. We should seek to guard

against risk, but we should be aware of seeking security to an extent that it becomes a compulsion. A little bit of insecurity is a good thing.

That's not because we actually want to experience harm in the world. The reason is that we don't want to deceive ourselves about the world. The world is an uncertain place where anything can happen at any moment. Some acceptance of the nature of the world is necessary to healthy living. Accepting that the world is full of risks can be important to a more realistic approach to living.

Ultimately, what we are guarding against during the holiday of Sukkot is the illusion of total control. This to me is the biggest limitation of secularism, and it is the reason that when asked, most people in our society insist that they are spiritual people. They want to have a spiritual life because they understand that total control is not possible. Yet, we are susceptible to this delusion and must guard against it. We are capable of controlling so much in our environment, but we shouldn't believe that we can control everything. This is simply an error.

And here is also where God enters in because what we have declared over the High Holidays is that God is King. God governs the universe, which is another way of saying that He is "in control." We don't have to look at the lack of ultimate control that we have over our lives as a deficiency. That is actually one of the features of the God-fearing disposition that we have to cultivate. The sukkah

approximates the experience we have in the world that is governed by God, and the security it gives us – while not complete – is comparable to the way that God continually and continuously protects us.

As frightening of letting go of the illusion of complete control is, we actually will experience that letting go as a liberation. And this is one of the meanings of freedom. Freedom is tinged with insecurity because freedom is partly about letting go. As we consider how to become the people we promised ourselves we would try to be over the High Holidays, we should embrace a little insecurity. That will help ground us in our relationship with God and become our best selves.