

Sukkot

HOLIDAY OBSERVANCE

(see also Emor, p.62)

Leviticus 23:40

And on the first day of the festival you shall take the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days.

Mishnah Sukkah 2:3

One who makes his *sukkah* on top of a wagon or on a boat has made an acceptable *sukkah*.... One who makes a *sukkah* on top of a tree or on a camel's back has made an acceptable *sukkah*.

Bavli Sukkah 2b

A *sukkah* which is higher than twenty cubits (more than 30 feet) is not valid, but Rabbi Yehudah declared it valid up to a height of forty or fifty cubits.

Rabbi Yehudah said, "It happened that Queen Helena in Lydda had a *sukkah* that was higher than twenty cubits and the elders nevertheless were going in and out of it and spoke not a word to her in disagreement."

Discussion Questions

1. The four species of the *lulav* (citron, palm, myrtle and willow) all have symbolic significance. If you were to make an “American *lulav*” of plants that represented four important things about you, what plants would you pick? For example, you could include a pine branch (or pine cone) as it is “ever green” to symbolize your hope that your love of Judaism would be evergreen.

2. You could almost make a Dr. Seuss poem out of this mishnah: “I will build it on a boat, I will build it on a goat, I will build it in a tree, I will build it by the sea....” What modern places could you think of to add to this list of where a *sukkah* might be creatively placed?

3. Queen Helena is an important figure in rabbinic literature. She converted to Judaism and was one of its most pious practitioners. Evidently, she had quite a lavish *sukkah*; perhaps so large that it contained rooms so she was able to invite many visitors at once. We invite “*ushpizin*”, spiritual guests, into our *sukkah* each year. Who would you invite in addition to the traditional seven (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David)? Will you make Helena part of your Sukkot celebration?