SUKKAH BUILDS COMMUNITY
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz – September 20, 2013

1. During the holiday of sukkot we are commanded to do something very uncomfortable
    a. No not sleep in the sukkah – though we are commanded to do that.
    b. We are commanded to invite people over to our home and welcome them.
        i. What's so uncomfortable about that?
        ii. Not just any people but strangers –
            1. Specifically the widow, the orphan, the stranger.
    c. WHY? – what possibly could a flimsy sukkah offer these categories of people?
        i. Not good shelter
        ii. No warmth
        iii. Yes a meal but it's a one shot holiday – not sustained support.
    d. No the nourishment/sustenance of sukkot is not the food, or even the celebrations – it's the people, the community.
    e. The widow, orphan, stranger – the one who sits outside the center of society is brought inside during sukkot. Literally brought into the tent.
        i. That can be any of us at a given moment in our lives.
            1. We are all enveloped in sadness at times like the widow
            2. We are each alone at times like the orphan, even if we are surrounded by family we can feel alone
            3. Each of us has felt like a stranger – not sure how we fit in, if we are accepted.

Unfamiliar with the social or societal norms and expectations

ii. Sharon and I felt like strangers when we moved here.
    1. You welcomed us
    2. Our neighborhood invited us in
    3. More than the food it was the conversation the connection. Food was just the entrée to entrée.

f. There are plenty of organizations that cater to the widow, the orphan and the stranger. Social services that do wonderful work making sure they are not overlooked or disenfranchised.

g. But as good as those agencies are they are stripped of their emotional or personal nurturing. They lack the humanity that only another person can extend.
    i. Rabbi Brad Artsen observes a single had can touch where a battalion of people cannot.

h. By practicing the mitzvah of *Haknasat orhim* / welcoming guests – we go beyond the physical needs of the widow orphan and stranger and tend to the spiritual needs. Needs we all have.

2. Ultimately hospitality is a question of defining our community broadly enough so that no one is left out, so that no one feels like they are
    a. A widow – stuck in the depths of their sadness
    b. An orphan – alone in a sea of people who have families and connections
    c. A stranger – unfamiliar and unsure of how to enter into the group.
3. This of course is not only a mitzvah worth remembering and practicing on sukkot. Its one we must do year round

a. This is why we are launching Havurot at Temple Sholom.
b. To create a hundred sukkahs, a shelter of hospitality, friendship and relationship in the vastness of our rather impersonal work-a-day modern world.
c. A havurah is a place where you can both invite others in and feel invited yourself.
    i. A place where you are supported in times of sadness and have others to celebrate with you in times of joy
    ii. Its an extended family
    iii. It's a experience that will quickly feel entirely familiar, as together as a group you establish your own customs and traditions.

4. I want to invite you each to build a havurah with your friends and those who you don't know well from this congregation.
    a. To create a sacred space, a shelter of hospitality and friendship.
    b. Like building a sukkah and filling it with people – its not easy to do. It takes courage and a little bit of chuzzpah.
        i. But the reward for you and for those who you invite in – sustains our community and will nourish its soul.
5. Sukkot is called zman simchateynu – the time of our rejoicing. Rejoicing is always better with other people. Build a sukkah, build a havurah – it will make Judaism and life more fun!