

DRASH – Dale Brown
October 11, 2025
Sukkot Shabbat Chol ha-Moed

Sukkah celebrates the harvest. It reminds us of how Hashem protected us when we left Egypt. We eat in booths that are covered in foliage (Chag HaSukkot) and remember the temporary dwellings we lived in as we travelled from Egypt to Israel. Sukkot is also joyful. We enjoy food and drink in our sukkah and get some relief from the somber days of awe.

We do not read V'zot Ha B'rakhah, the next portion of the Torah. Instead we reread the section of Exodus where the Lord gives us the ten commandments a second time and reaffirms his covenant. Then we read Ecclesiastes.1-12 which poetically and powerfully tells us that there is a time and a place for everything. It encourages us to enjoy life despite an unfair world. It is the perfect reading for today.

In Exodus Moses asks the Lord to take the lead in bringing the people to Israel - and the Lord agrees to this. If The Lord lets Moses see his face, Moses would die. So he puts Moses in a cleft in a rock so that Moses only sees his back. The imagery of the Lord putting Moses in a cleft of the rock made me feel protected.

We then read Ecclesiastes, which our leyners have so beautifully read in Hebrew. Ecclesiastes, at times, can sound as if **life is quite hopeless**. As a matter of fact, the first words are:

“Utter futility” said Koheleth. “Utter futility! All is futile!

It says The world goes about its cycles- you live and then you die. There is nothing new beneath the sun.

It's really depressing in the beginning, but I found it rather comforting to read the poetry about how the world goes in cycles. Bob Dylan was also inspired by this. He used eight of the verses for a song and titled it *Turn, Turn, Turn*. If I had the voice I would sing it.

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

So many things that seem new have been going on at least since this was written and apparently before.

Life is unfair. Here are some lines, which could have been written today:

5:7 If you see in a province oppression of the poor and suppression of right and justice, don't wonder at the fact; for one high official is protected by a higher one, and both of them by still higher ones.

Since we don't have an English reading, I'll read another example of the unfairness of life -...

8:11 Here is another frustration: the fact that the sentence imposed for evil deeds is not executed swiftly, which is why men are emboldened to do evil—the fact that a sinner can do evil a hundred times and his punishment still delayed.

And here is a place where he proposes a solution. Verses 8:15 and 8:16 :

8:15 Here is a frustration that occurs in this world: sometimes an upright man is requited according to the conduct of a scoundrel; and sometimes the scoundrel is requited according to the conduct of the upright. I say all that in frustration.

8:16 I therefore praised enjoyment. For the only good a man can have under the sun is to eat and drink and enjoy himself. That much can accompany him, in exchange for his wealth, through the days of life that God has granted him under the sun.

Ecclesiastes gives us permission and divine approval to enjoy life. Many, many verses suggest enjoyment. Verse 9:7 says, "Go, eat your bread in gladness, and drink your wine in joy for your action was long

ago approved by God. “ Interestingly enough, Free DC, Indivisible and many of the current non-violent anti-authoritarian movements suggest prioritizing joy as one of the successful tactics of movements that have succeeded in overcoming authoritarian regimes in their country.

King Solomon, son of David, points to the importance of enjoying the present and feeling gratitude for God for what you have received. The portion which is melancholy and sad, ends with the following words “Revere God and observe his commandments!

So here is my question for our discussion:

How have you used Sukkot and/or the cycle of high holy days to protect yourself against negativity about the problems that we face in the world?