

Keeping Our Homes Safe
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 Temple Beth El, Charlotte, North Carolina
 Friday, October 14, 2011 - Shabbat Sukkot

The Sukkah is a home for our community made of ideals, not bricks or mortar. The temporary structure, built to remind us of our difficult times moving between Egypt and the Promised Land, brings to mind that our community's fabric comes from strong ethics, not stalwart buildings.

Sukkot offers us the opportunity to look at a simpler dwelling, a home with no hidden areas. Its flaws and its beauty are revealed easily, the Sukkah reminds us of a simpler existence.

With such a simple home as an example, we can turn our consciousness to the difficulties that may lie hidden in our own homes. In the midst of Domestic Violence Awareness month, we can use Sukkot to open ourselves up to the difficulties that lay hidden amongst us.

One in four homes is affected by Domestic Abuse - even Jewish homes. Homes built by all types of people. Moving the community to an awareness of our homes and their structures, moving them outside and into the Sukkah, may also mean moving ourselves to a greater awareness of these difficulties all around us.

Just as the Sukkah is a simplification of the home, and so a symbol, these problems in real homes should not be simplified. The abusive relationship too often blames the victim, on the one hand, and our solutions to abuse may dehumanize the abuser as well. A persistent abusive home leaves everyone damaged and in jeopardy, and requires all of our energies to unravel and make whole again.

Wholeness, another translation of Shalom, is our goal - we aim for a Sukkat Shalom, a Sukkah of peaceful wholeness, in the same way that we aim for Sh'lom Bayit - peaceful wholeness in the home. Creating such wholeness requires awareness, deliberation, and thoughtful action. We must see the issues, figure out helpful paths to solve them, and then go out and make it happen.

At Temple Beth El we have already led the way with a Resolution of Domestic Abuse:

WHEREAS Judaism affirms the sanctity of life and the inherent right of each person to a life of dignity and respect, and to a home that embodies such values, and

WHEREAS a Jewish House of Worship should be a safe haven for anyone who is suffering from any form of domestic abuse, and

WHEREAS domestic abuse, especially the battering of women, is a problem that has too often been minimized, ignored, or denied in the Jewish community, and

WHEREAS certain misconceptions exist regarding battered women and men that dismiss, deny, and blame the victim rather than the perpetrator,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Temple Beth El and its members acknowledge the presence of domestic abuse in our Temple family and the Jewish community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Temple Beth El and its leadership will offer guidance about domestic abuse and make it known to our congregants that victims may come to us for help and that we will educate our congregants in order to recognize and help prevent domestic abuse.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Temple Beth EI will take the steps that are necessary and appropriate to become a safe and welcoming place for anyone in our Temple family who is in a domestic abuse situation.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Temple Beth EI leadership will offer educational and ethical action programs about domestic abuse, and that we will institute appropriate forums in our congregation and community regarding the issue of domestic abuse.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Temple Beth EI will call upon and work with other religious and secular organizations throughout our community to educate and engage in a campaign of outreach and awareness regarding domestic abuse.

We must work to embody the other symbol of Sukkot the lulav and etrog. These four items are often depicted as four aspects of ourselves:

- The myrtle leaves shaped like our eyes, the eyes with which we see into the dark places in our lives that need attention.
- The etrog shaped like our heart, the heart with which we feel with sympathy another's plight, and that beats with justice to improve it.
- The willow leaves shaped like our mouths which must speak out about these issues with courage.
- And the palm branch, stalwart like our spines, which must stand strong and act for the sake of ourselves and others who need our actions that will bring repair to lives and the world.

We remember that while we pray to God for the resources to bring such repair, the responsibility for the doing of it is our responsibility, and so we declare our responsibility for bringing about the better world that we seek. Let us be the change needed to make our homes safe.