Jeremy Rosen - From Nature to Nurture How the Festival of Sukkot Evolved

- So I just want to say thank you very much for today. I know that you're going to be talking about nature to nurture and how the Festival of Sukkot has evolved, and I'm just going to hand straight over to you. Thank you very much.

- Good afternoon, everybody. Or good evening. Sukkot, I can't think of a better example to illustrate how over 3000 years and more the Jewish religion and tradition has changed and developed, has added and removed. What originally started off as a pagan festival round about 4,000 years ago, we have a record in the Middle East of Pagan harvest festivals. There was the beginning of the barley harvest. There was the beginning of the wheat harvest. And then in the autumn there was the gathering of everything from the harvests together. And in the pagan world, of course, these festivals were celebrated by orgies and so to speak, dancing around the May pole. They were places of and occasions of great joy, but great self-indulgence. And so the Bible or the biblical tradition, whenever it developed, we could always argue about that, tried to put a new gloss and a new emphasis on the harvest festival. In the early days of the pagan world, people worshipped nature.

They worshipped nature cause they were afraid of nature. They worried about whether they would get their good harvest or their bad harvest. They didn't know whether they'd get the rain and what the yield was going to bring. And so out of fear, they worshipped , and this is reflected in the idea of human sacrifice. So originally the biblical tradition said, let's take these biblical, these pagan harvests, harvest festivals and let's adapt them slightly. The first way we're going to adapt them is to take on the idea of joy and pleasure, have a good time, but we want this having a good time to be more disciplined and more controlled. What monotheism did was to say to everybody, look, you don't have to be terrified of all these forces. There's just one source who's going to take care of everything for you, but you have to be faithful to that one source. So the harvest festivals, three of them, Pesach, Barley Harvest, Shavuot, Wheat Harvest, and Sukkot, the autumnal final gathering of everything marked the year in the pagan world and now in the Israelite world. The idea of these festivals therefore became primarily one in which you focus on three different principles. Principle number one is that you have a history.

A history going back to Moses, to the development of the monotheistic national idea of the children of Israel. Then you have the idea that these festivals somehow have got to focus on you as a person and make demands on you, on the ordinary human being, not just on the priests or the big guys, but on the ordinary person. And finally, you have this idea that somehow or other there is another dimension, a non-physical dimension, not the dimension of the sun and the moon and the stars, but something else. And so what the festival of Sukkot in the autumn started off as, was simply this opportunity to appreciate nature and the harvest, to appreciate God and to appreciate our history. What Judaism did was to take these ideas and translate them into a structure, into the constitution if you like, which gave both discipline on the one hand, and it was a constant touchstone that everybody could refer to. It wasn't that you relied on witches or magicians to tell you what to do. Everybody knew in advance what the demands were.

Sukkot we all know involves building a sukkah. The sukkah originally was there the whole of the summer. Throughout the harvest season, it was there to protect the crops as shade for the watchmen and as indicative of the harvest season. And you made the sukkah with the sort of materials that you had easily accessible. But of course that was only a practical side of it. The theological side of it is that, you know, God protects you, and historically, God always did protect you. He took you out of Egypt, you were in the desert. There was no control. It was a wild place. And yet there were, there was protection. And in fact, later on the Talmud is going to say there are three explanations of significance of sukkah. One of them is that it offers shade, protection. And that's why the roof of the sukkah always has to have more shade than sun. The other is that it's temporary, to remind oneself of the transience of life. And we never know if what we have today we will have tomorrow or not. And finally, the spiritual dimension, you want to cope with life and get through it, then there is a way without being subject to magic and hocus pocus, and that's the God element.

Now what's interesting is that the sukkah itself was something that anybody could do. Whereas originally when the children of Israel came out of Egypt and into the land of Israel, their religion was primarily one of the sanctuary. The sanctuary was the one place where all Israelites would come together, and they would come together three times a year. There were these three, they're called Shalosh Regalim, pilgrim festivals, when they'd swarm up. First of all to places like Shiloh and Bethel and then when they have a temple, up to the temple, and this is where they came together. But otherwise they were divided into fractious tribes who often fought with each other and disagreed with each other. And this was the one occasion when they could all come together. So there was within the idea of Sukkot, this idea of the national festival, the national holiday where we meet up with each other. And it was more than that. It was a great fair. It was a great time when people brought their produce into Jerusalem, and then they would very soon go back out to their distant tribes, which were as far north as Lebanon, as far south as Sinai, and going across the river Jordan into Transjordania.

Eventually, within a short period of time, within about 500 years, there's going to be a big Jewish community in the east in Mesopotamia, a big Jewish community in Egypt, in fact another Jewish temple down by the Aswan Dam in Elephantine. But to begin with, it got everybody together. And at that particular time, religion on a private level was totally at home wherever you were. And everybody was within that structure free to do as much or as little as they did. And it didn't matter how much or how little you did. If you came to the temple, that was the way you showed your national identity at that particular time. But the Sukkah was an example of how the individuals were involved. You build your own sukkah. Of course anybody who goes to Jerusalem nowadays will see at Sukkot, every balcony has got a sukkah. Here in New York, you're very hard pushed to find a balcony with a sukkah on it anyway, but this was the first example of individual participation to balance what went on in the temple, which was a performance and a ceremony on a national level.

The Torah also mentioned something other interestingly, that at the en Sukkot, towards the end

of Sukkot, every seven years there would be a reading of the Torah so that everybody would have access to so to speak the Constitution. But what the Torah, what did they mean by that? It can't mean all the five books of Moses, which one time took three years to get through. Now we take a whole year to get through. You're not going to expect at least specifically, I want the men, the women and the children, everybody should be there for reading this Sefer ha-Berit. So clearly it was an abbreviated form they read, but the main idea of it was to say this is your constitution. This is how you, when you go away from this place, should be living your lives on a private level. So that was one element of Sukkot in the biblical period. The other element was taking these four plants. There was what's known now as the etrog. There is the date palm, the willow and the fruit of a special tree.

And this statement, which is all the Torah tells us, illustrates how even then at that time there must have been an oral law, an amendment to the constitution. Because when Moses says, take the fruit of a nice tree, well, what is the fruit of a nice tree? Is it a kumquat? We don't know what it was. Therefore there must have been some way of putting in practise what Moses or whoever it was said you should do on Sukkot. And this idea of the other law is, if you like, the wiggle room, it's the flexibility room that enables Judaism and did to adapt to all kinds of different circumstances. What's the significance of these four kinds? Well, when we get later on in this talk and talk about the mystical side, we'll go into that. But in the meantime it's clear that they had a lot to do with water, different kinds of irrigation, natural, the rivers that produce the willow trees, willow symbolises the water. There's those trees with deep roots.

Then there's the date palm that grows by these oasis. And then there's the fruit, whether it was an orange or whether it was a lemon or whether it was an etrog that need irrigation. So clearly the implication of this is that autumn is the time when we think about rain, and we need rain, we need rain for the crops, but it doesn't actually say that in the Torah. And that's a deduction that we may make in the light of hindsight. So the arba minim, these four kinds, represent the idea that this time of the year we've got to think about water, and we've got to think about rain. And then the interesting thing is that three times on Sukkot, the Torah says, guys, be happy. You've got to enjoy life. We don't want to be a killjoy in our religion. I know you liked it in the pagan time when you could go have a great time at the temple prostitutes and have a wonderful time, but you know, we are more disciplined now. But that doesn't mean to say you can't have fun. You can still have fun even if there are certain restrictions.

And joy, happiness was there in all the three pilgrim festivals, but especially there when it came to Sukkot. So there, that's what we had. I'm going to talk a bit later on about the Karaites, those who had a different interpretation of the text. And to this very day, they don't walk around with the lulav and the etrog and shake it. No, they put it in the roof, in the sechach above in a sukkah because the Torah is not clear about what you do with the lulav and the etrog. And here again you have our law giving different interpretations. So let's move on then from the period of the five books of Moses into the period of the prophets, and it's there that according to the Talmudic tradition, the prophets brought in a new innovation. And the innovation was this idea of nisuch hamayim, of pouring out water. And the record is that in the temple there was a well house.

And during the intermediary days of the Yom Tov, of the festival, they would parade around this well house in the temple every day with their willows and their leaves and with music and with dancing. And then they'd pour out of the temple into the streets. And as the Talmud says, who has never experienced the joy of this Simchat Beit HaShoeivah this joy over the well, has never seen a happy occasion in his life because all the religious guys went dancing and juggling and catapulting themselves into the air. It was an ecstatic party, a massive party. And again, if you are in Israel, and you want to go down to Me'a She'arim, to this day during the intermediary period of Sukkot, there will be bands, there will be music, there'll be dancing coming from every religious building you can think of, and everybody's gathered there. It's an incredible experience that those of us living in the diaspora had no idea of. I had no idea before I went to Israel. So this was innovation number one.

This Simchat Beit HaShoeivah, this rejoicing around the well house. And that obviously was all to do with water. It was saying to God, in other words, look, water is such a precious commodity that we prepare to pour it out in the hope that you will make sure we get plenty more of it in the year to come. And then after that period, we have the last seventh day of Sukkot. We call it Hoshanah Rabbah, and it's the festival of Shemini Atzeret. Shemini Atzeret, we're told nothing about it, but it's the eighth, it's the eighth day. It is an atzeret, which means a time of everybody coming together. And so if you like, it was a kind of farewell party, the big farewell party before everybody then disappeared off. There are certain things we know about this. We know about for example, Shemini Atzeret, it was so important to do with rain that on the festival Sukkot, we ask God to give us rain. Please let the wind blow and the rain come down. But it's interesting, there's another blessing about rain that goes in three times in the daily prayer book when we bless this year, and we ask to give rain and dew. And we don't start saying that until the beginning of December. And the question is why not?

And the Talmud explains because after the last day of Simchat Torah, all the Jews from the diaspora had to go home. It took time for them to get home. We don't ask God to rain while they're travelling on the way home. So we ask God, please hold off on the rain until we get back home to Babylon or Egypt or wherever it was we were going to because it took much longer in those days to get there. So there you have the structure of the festival of Sukkot and the position of Shemini Atzeret, and the question then is where do most of our current ideas come from if they're not in that earlier biblical and immediate post biblical period? Well, the first thing to note is that 2000 years ago, Judaism ceased being a place of the sanctuary. It lost the idea of the sanctuary. There was no anymore. And therefore in a sense, the home became your sanctuary, and parallel with that, the community centre became your sanctuary. And the genius of the rabbis in this transition period is that they said we're going to define ourselves intellectually through study. It's through study that we are going to survive.

We're going to borrow from the Greeks the idea of the symposium, the idea of question and answer, but we're going to use that to perpetuate our own tradition. And that's when they introduce the idea of reading the Torah in public. And as I mentioned before, there were two

traditions that came in, one of them reading it every three years. But finally at the time of the Geonium, roughly a thousand years ago, everybody agreed to read it in one annual session. Still to this day, there are many people who argue, takes too long on Shabbat morning. But nevertheless, that's the tradition we have. And that Torah was read once a year, and so comes the autumn. We've got to start again at Bereshit. But in fact we start again before Bereshit on what's called Shemini Atzeret or what we call Simchat Torah. So Simchat Torah, this great occasion of rejoicing in Israel is merged into Shemini Atzeret, this eighth day. In the diaspora because we keep two days, Simchat Torah is an extra day later. So you'll be confused. You could separate, you could in fact celebrate two Simchat Torahs, one in Israel and then catch on a plane, nip across to the diaspora and celebrate it a second day there if you were so minded. People do that for Purim, but not necessarily for Simchat Torah.

So the whole idea of Simchat Torah as recognising the importance of Torah, both because we have in Jerusalem read it once partly on that day, and now we're completing it as part of the diaspora puts the emphasis on the study of Torah, on our constitution as the way we're going to go forward into the next era. But the next dramatic change and almost revolution in Jewish life took place in the early Middle Ages with the advent of Kabbalah, of this new variation of an ancient mystical tradition. But really it's the wise men of provenance and northern Spain who roundabout a thousand years ago structured a new culture within Judaism based around eventually a book called The Zohar. Now The Zohar, the bright light, was attributed to the great mystic in the Talmud. And there are a lot of mystics in the Talmud. And if I ever get round to talking about Jewish myths and mysticism, we're going to look at those earlier ones. But The Zohar was written in a language, an Aramaic language, which was very different to the Aramaic they spoke at the time of Shema five thousand years before that.

The Zohar through Kabbalah has come to be the most influential book in the Jewish cannon after the Talmud. And it has been adopted not only by the mystics in the Sephardic world and in the Ashkenazi world, but also by Hasidism. And many of the new customs that have entered into Sukkot as a festival come from The Zohar and come from this mystical tradition. So for example, in many Orthodox Sukkot you'll find decorations talking about the ushpizin. Now ushpizin is an Aramaic word. Ushpiz is to host, you host guests. This was part of the ancient culture. They didn't have hotels the way we do. People, Jews were travelling around, they needed to be entertained. Entertainment was very important, but it's not just entertaining for food. We've got to entertain in a spiritual level. And so there are seven guests, one for each day of Sukkot, starting with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, going on to Moses and Aaron, and then there's David and then there's Joseph. Some traditions put Joseph first and some put David first.

And that's to do with another debate we might come to sometime about what kind of Messiah do we think is going to be? Are we going to have a David Messiah or a Joseph Messiah? But anyway, the idea of ushpizin has now become very significant. And when you look at the text that is read to invite each guest into the sukkah on that night, you'll see a kabbalistic text with kabbalistic ideas embedded in it. But that has been adopted almost by everybody now, even if you're not a kabbalist. So there's a new innovation barely 500 years old. In addition to that, The

Zohar is very, very keen on the idea of Messiah, very keen on the idea of the Messiah. And part of this is to due to the fact that when the prophets talked about celebrating Sukkot, they also talked about celebrating Sukkot with the non-Jews. We expect the Egyptians to come and celebrate Sukkot, and the Aramians, and the Babylonians, and we want everybody to be together. And so you have coming out of this idea of Messianism, the idea that Hoshana Rabbah, the last day of Hol Hamoed, before we stop many have said is when the Messiah's going to come. And how do we get Messiah to come by studying Torah.

And so we stay up all night studying Torah in the hope that this is going to bring the Messiah to come, and to remember again the importance of Torah and how significant it is. But also the mystics added another factor, and this other factor's not mentioned anywhere else. And the factor goes like this on Rosh Hashanah, you are written into the Book of Life. On Yom Kippur, you are inscribed in the Book of Life, but you've still got until Hoshana Rabbah to make up for anything you missed out. And so Hoshana Rabbah is a day when we wish everybody G'mar tova, may your fate finally be decided. And typical of how magic entered into Judaism in the mystical mediaeval period, there is a tradition that if you don't see the shadow of your head during Hoshana Rabbah, you will die during the coming year. Now, I hope that you don't take this sort of superstition very seriously, but I'm afraid there are a lot of people who take all these things very, very seriously.

And this is all part of the idea of Hoshana Rabbah, and this is why on Hoshana Rabbah, we also mention Ēlīyyāhū, Elijah. Elijah, we mention him of course at the seder table, but we mention Elijah as the person who's going to bring the Messianic era in, in which we won't be oppressed in it by anybody. And we'll be free to travel where we ever we want to, in which we will live happily ever after using our own potential and our own capacity to be what we should become. So on Hoshana Rabbah, people also in the Yiddish world say, may you have a gut kvitl. A kvitle is a little piece of paper you write a wish to the Rabbi on. And this is writing a wish to God, they should have a good blessing and a happy year. You also say pitka tava which is the same thing in Aramaic for those who prefer the Aramaic version to the Yiddish version. And you also have this tradition which is very old of beating the willows, of smashing the willows on Hoshanna Rabbah. You go around, seven times around the ark, and you take these willows and you bash them. Again, this is an example of beating out the bad.

In mediaeval times it was beating the devil, but it was another way of, if you like, finalising this whole ceremony that's been going on for eight days. And the idea of development and evolution that I've tried to describe for you brings me back to the Karaites because the Karaites who were the successors of the Samaritans, believed that only the written Torah should count. All the rabbinic interpretation is a load of hocus pocus and a lot of unnecessary stuff that we can do very well without. And I know there are lots of Jews today who would probably agree with them except that there's a problem here. And the problem here is that if you don't innovate, you stagnate. And for example, the Torah said, as I mentioned before, that you take these four plants, and you walk around and ceremonially take them round. That is an example of the oral law, as is the Etrog. But there are other examples. So that for example, the Torah says, don't

burn fire on the seventh day. Now that in itself is very strange because in the temple they burnt fire every day. There were sacrifices going on every single day, including Shabbat and festivals. But at home for the individual it said, don't burn fire.

Now the Karaites took that literally. You don't have fire. The rabbis on the other hand said, sure. What it means is you can have fire, you can keep warm, but this fire really should be prepared in advance. And going back 2000 years ago, they were the popularists, the priests were the aristocrats. They wanted to keep all the power and the religious sovereignty to themselves. They said, no, you can only burn fire in the temple. You can't have it anywhere else. And the rabbis who challenged and said, no, it's all very well for you. You're wealthy. You've got your blankets and your homes, your nice homes, and if it gets too cold in winter, you can go to your holiday homes in Caesarea or Tiberius. But what about the poor peasants in the host of Judea are freezing in the winter when it's cold. So we've got to allow them something.

And so they innovated and introduced the idea that you could have fire. The Sadducees didn't, and their heirs, after the Sadducees disappeared when the temple went, they also decided, look, no fire. And actually the Karaite community was stricter than the Orthodox Jewish community. So for example, there was a limit to your freedom, a limit to who you could marry. You couldn't marry out of the Karaite Faith in any way. There was no concept of conversion or moving in or adaptation. And in the end it was the rigidity of the Karaites, not their scholarship of the Torah, knowledge of the Torah, that in the first period of the Geonim in 900, more or less disappeared from being the most powerful element in the Mesopotamia. The Karaites still survive. It's interesting that at one stage there was a Karaite community in Lithuania who appealed to the Nazis to dissociate themselves from Jews so that they wouldn't be subject to Nazi regime.

But nowadays, most Karaites identify, there are thousands of them, not millions, thousands of them. Some in Cologne and Tel Aviv, some in California. They now split into the electric Karaites and non-electric Karaites. The electric Karaites will use electricity on Shabbat, whereas the non-electric Karaites won't. Some will inter marry and some won't. But nevertheless, they have not been a force within Judaism now for over a thousand years. But their influence is there in this constant tension between innovation and status, conservatism. So what I've tried to describe to you in this presentation is how a tradition can go from being a pagan tradition and develop at different stages in a different direction away from the sanctuary towards study and adding on new ideas that come from the mystical tradition and from other traditions until we come to the world in which we are today, and the world we are today, I would say Sukkot is the ecological festival. It's a festival that reminds us of the importance of nature. We take nature into our hands, we smell it, we appreciate it, we realise how lucky we are to have it, and we've got to do whatever we can to avoid destroying it.

And how important water is. You know, I grew up in England, and it was raining all the bloody time. Nobody cared about water then. But now we realise how terribly important it was, and we've got to preserve it. And how much disease comes through water and so forth and so on.

So the idea of Sukkot as being a time when we emphasise the importance of ecology, when we emphasise the importance of being part of the universal world. There's one thing I forgot to mention, and that is that in the Torah on Sukkot, there was were 70 bulls sacrificed in the temple. First day, 13, then 12, and going down. Those bulls became associated with a non-Jewish world because at the time of the Greeks, there was this idea that there was 70 nations adopted by the Jews. And so somewhere during the Talmudic period, the idea came in that Sukkot isn't just for us, it's for the whole of the world, for everybody. And we can't see ourselves as living isolated. We've got to see ourselves as being part of the universe and responsible for it and not shutting ourselves away in the ghetto.

Now unfortunately, over the millennia we've been turned in on ourselves. We've come indeed as a result of the Shoah to think the rest of the world doesn't care about us. They were happy to see us disappear, but we survived. And so we've become so focused on the idea of our own survival that I think we've neglected the importance of our universal message on a natural level to nature and preserving the universe and on the national level to be part of the wider group of nations. Even if they don't always want us, we've still got to stick to our obligation, which is one of the great things we see in Israel where they send people out to any disaster, wherever it is in the world in order to try and do their little bit for it. So it's this. It is the emphasis of studies. Study is so important. We have access to so much now on the internet. We can get almost anything we want. All of the Talmud is on the internet. But we need to exercise our brain. We need to exercise our memory. And therefore, these old traditions of reading from the Torah, memorising the Torah, memorising and studying our holy texts is as important today as it ever was in the past.

And so from something that started off pagan to something that I think has so much to give to us and to the universe, Pesach has been there for us. And we've been there for it. As we've gone a little bit of time, back to the Karaites and to the Samaritans cause the Samaritans were another group that exists, still survive today. Also, half of them are split on the West Bank where they live under the Palestinian authority. And the other half of them are again down Tel Aviv on the coastal plain. Where do the Samaritans come from? Now, as you know, at the time of King Solomon, there was one, so to speak, unified country of 12 tribes. But as soon as Solomon died, they fractured. Solomon had been the one unifying factor. David was the first guy to get them all together, but Solomon unified them. But as Solomon died the north, the 10 northern tribes turned up at Jerusalem and said to Solomon's son, Rehoboam, who was from the tribe of Judah, look, your father taxed us like mad. He taxed us to build a temple in Jerusalem, to build everything, and we are a bit fed up with the cost of maintaining Jerusalem.

So we'd like a little bit more freedom, a little bit more autonomy. Rehoboam's answer to that was, don't be ridiculous, I'm going to show you who's boss. If my father lashed you with whips, I shall lash you with scorpions. And so the 10 northern tribes split off under a man called Yuref of Jeroboam, and they immediately set up two pagan temples in the north in Dan and Bethel with a golden calf inside, which shows how powerful the Pagan influence still was throughout all this period. So from the period of about 900, there are two Jewish states, the state of Judea with

Judah and Benjamin and the Northern Ten tribes who are known by and large as the tribes under Joseph cause Joseph was the biggest one. So there's Joseph in the north and David in the south. They rivalled, and they fought. Sometimes they allied themselves, but more often than not, they were at loggerheads. In 722, the powerful kingdom of Assyria in the north came down, those of you who know your English poetry will know Syria came down like a wolf on the fold. His cohorts were gleaning in silver and gold and took the whole of the 10 Northern tribes into captivity in Assyria which is roughly where Kurdistan is today, Northern Syria, Turkey, that area. And their policy was that when you conquer a country, you take all inhabitants away, you scatter 'em so they can never reconstitute, and after you've scattered them, you then replace them with other parts of your empire.

And the northern kingdom was known as Samaria because of its capital Šōmrōn. And so these new people that were settled there are called the Samaritans, the Šōmrōnīm. That is the story that is told in the Book of Kings. And in the book of Chronicles in the Bible. When these guys came, they found themselves attacked by wild animals. And they said, oh, that's because we don't know the local gods. We knew the gods in Assyria, not local gods. So they sent a messenger to the King of Assyria and said please help us. We've got to learn about who the local gods are. And the King of Assyria sent down to Judea and said please send some priests up to the north and teach them what the rules are. And that's what happened. And they learned the rules, and they converted. But according to the Old Testament, they converted not out of religious belief, but because they were frightened of wild animals. They were frightened. It wasn't positive, it was negative. And that's why they called , the converts of lions 'cause they were frightened of the lions. So they then developed parallel with Judea for another 200 years until finally Judea itself was captured by the Babylonians who destroyed the Assyrians.

And the Babylonians then took these Jews from the cultured and intelligence intellectuals and the skill to Babylon, where they plunked them all together in one area and allowed them to remain a strong community. Some were left in Egypt. They were left in Israel, the working classes, so to speak. And they went down to Egypt after was assassinated. So for a while, the Samaritans were left as the only people in the land of Israel professing loyalty to the Bible. Many years later, the Babylonians are conquered by the Persians, and the Persians invite the Israelites to go back to have a kind of a colony loyal to the Persians on the Mediterranean. And first they went back in one stage and another stage. But when they got back, the Samaritans said, get out of it. You don't belong here. Not only do you not belong here, but the Torah, which we take seriously talks about two mountains. It talks about Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. And these two mountains are in Samaria in the north. And we've built our temple in Samaria, and that's our temple. No where in the Torah did it say anything about Mount Zion, about building a temple on that place in Jerusalem. You've come up and invented it.

So we are trying to stop you, and they did. And there was a civil war, and they blocked them. And they blocked them for quite a while until finally under King Darius, he sent another group back under Ezra and Nehemiah, and they were able to rebuild a temple in Jerusalem. So the enmity between the Samaritans and the Israelites lasted for quite a long time. But what's

interesting is that the Samaritans still to this day have a Torah, a text of the Torah that is very similar to ours, not exactly the same. First of all, it's written in the original script that Moses will have written it in because the script that our Torah is written in is called the Square Script of Ashuri, the Assyrian Babylonian script. And they believe their version is more correct than ours. In fact, there are surprisingly small variations, relatively few variations, but they still have it. And as I said, they carried on. They have a different narrative. Their narrative is no, we're not the guys that were brought out the way you Judeans say. You're just trying to dispossess us.

We were part of the original 10 tribes but we hid when the Syrians came, Assyrians. And then when they'd gone, we came out again. So we've been there longer than you. We're the original ones, the original 10 tribes. And that has been their claim to this very day. And the rivalry remains. There was a time during the Talmudic period when the rabbis considered Samaritans to be Jews because they were so strict in those laws of the Bible they kept, but by the time you get to the destruction of the temple, they're not regarded as such. They're regarded as in competition. Hence, you have the famous story of Jesus meeting the good Samaritan as opposed to the bad rabbis. But that's part of a different polemic. So they basically were in a sense, marginalised by the rabbis who after the temple was destroyed became the sole voice of main rabbinic Judaism, the Sadducees, the priests who disappeared. They didn't have a temple anymore. They lost their power. They lost all their goodies.

They weren't there. What happens is that over the next 500 years, this influence of the Samaritans and the Sadducees is maintained by a group of Jews called the Karaites who always saw themselves as Jews, and their founder, a man called Anan Ben David was a great scholar who even mainstream Judaism turned to for scholarly information. And he was involved with a polemical battle between himself and between the head of the traditional community. The was a very strong, aggressive querulous man, and in effect, it was thanks to him that by and large the Karaite community was then excluded from Judaism. Otherwise they might have remained in as a kind of a reform or conservative variation of the main.
What this illustrates to me is that we've always been fractious. We've always had our different peoples, our different congregations and our different communities, and our different ways of treating the law. And of course the advent of mysticism exaggerated this as well, so nothing much has changed, but the lesson we get from it is a lesson that Trudy and I have often talked about is this ability of adaptability. That on the one hand you can be adaptable when you've got, if you like a good foundation, when you've got a constitution. This constitution is there. It doesn't change, but the constitution has the amendment to the Constitution. It's that that's flexible, and it's that that has given us the Sukkot that we have today. So that was a bit extra on the side, but thank you.

- Jeremy, thank you very much. It was excellent and very, very, very informative.

- Thank you for the opportunity.

- Thanks, Jeremy. So I'm going to just say we are going to sign off now, and you and I have got

a Zoom meeting in about 10 minutes.

- Yeah, on the same location or another one.

- I asked Shauna to set it up, so.

- Oh, yeah, new one.

- All right. Thank you very much. Thanks everybody. Good afternoon, good day, and good night. Thanks, bye-bye.