Creating a Sukkah as a Meditative Space

Since I was young, Sukkot has always been my favorite holiday. As a child it brought together many of my favorite things: food, family, friends and the outdoors. My grandparents and extended family all lived in the same building in Washington Heights. My grandmother created a stunning Sukkah of wood with windows to see the Hudson River, hanging lights and added Persian carpets on the walls to keep us warm.

In my 20's, I returned to New York after living in Israel and traveling throughout the world for four years. I moved to my first apartment, a brownstone located in the 80's on the West Side between Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues. A key feature of this brownstone apartment was a huge garden where I saw the possibility of having a Sukkah there. For the next 10 years, I created a Sukkah constructed of wooden beams with heavy duty see-though plastic, acting as windows so that one felt surrounded by the garden. It was a moving week-long holiday banquet with hundreds of friends, neighbors and friends of friends coming every year. In the late 1980's my growing family moved to an apartment building where I was unable to create my own Sukkah. Since then, I have been creating Sukkah's with children's groups for synagogues that are open not only to community members, but to anyone who wanted to have a meal there. Since the JCC opened, I have been celebrating in their Sukkah and working with children in their program, creating decorations to beautify the Sukkah. I continue to this day to bring food and serve family and friends along with community leaders during the holiday.

Sukkot is a time to feel at one with nature, to have an open door to strangers and invite them to participate in the holiday. I feel as if it is Judaism's Thanksgiving.

Sukkot is "the holiday of the harvest." Understanding that you can plant the seeds and do everything right, but if nature does not permit, you have a failed crop and there is no food.

This opportunity to create a sukkah for the Marlene Myerson JCC of Manhattan is one of the most exhilarating projects that I can imagine.