My *sukkah,* my little holiday booth*,* is up. A few students came by today, pulled the old wooden frame with its lattice-work sides out of the garage, and put it together. The whole construction job took about fifteen minutes, but created a moment of great significance and joy.

Sukkot is far and away my favorite holiday of the Jewish year. It forces me to spend time outdoors, something I love to do in any case. But it also makes me take notice, pay attention to what is happening on the climatological or seasonal clock. The Torah calls this moment *tekufat ha-shanah*, the turning of the year. This festival is the one originally called *hag*, the circle (the same word as *haj* in Arabic). The year comes around to complete its circle and we celebrate it by walking in circles around the altar, one each day for six days, and then seven circles on the seventh. Then the year has *really* turned; the cycle has been completed. It is time to pray for rain.

This has been a magnificent summer in New England. Maybe only three or four days were hot enough to make us uncomfortable. The rest were all clear, mild, and beautiful, one after another. I am a regular outdoor walker in the summer, and I was only sent in to the treadmill on one or two occasions. The reservoir around which I walk shone each day with a reflection of either clear sky or clouds, sometimes a little breeze churning up the waters to give them a sense of movement. The Canada geese who are a regular part of the summer landscape here add to the beauty of the scene, even though their presence sometimes makes the pattern of one’s walk a little less simple than it might be.

Now fall is in full motion. The days are cooler, rain a little more frequent. The colors are about halfway to their prime, which means that here and there you already get a single tree in stupendous reds and yellows. Among the many unexplained wonders of the fall, I will never understand why the process is as long and varied in pace as it is. Why should one tree go all magnificent and then be shorn of its leaves, already in winter brown, while its neighbors are just barely undressing of their summer greens?

As we put up the *sukkah*, the man who clears our leaves was just finishing his second such visit, perhaps out of five or six. He didn’t stare or ask; he’s seen us do this strange bit of construction every year for the past twenty. He’s even been around when the little hut is filled with loudly singing young people, I hope as great a source of joy to him as it is for me.

We Jews famously come from a two-season climate and have plunked ourselves down here in a land that thinks of itself as having four. But as I look at our climate from the viewpoint of our Jewish calendar, I see us North Americans as really having two seasons as well, one of growth and verdure, the other of death and dormancy. Next week we’ll ask God for rain and then start mentioning the miracle of its falling in every prayer from now until late March or April. Yes, much of that rain will come down in the form of snow; much of our dormancy period will see my reservoir frozen over and the path around it too snow-covered for any good walking. There I will be, on the treadmill at our local Y, dreaming of next spring, of Passover, of the first sight of daffodils and green sprouts that will, with God’s help, come back again.

I know the sukkah probably originated as a harvest booth, a little shelter in the fields where one could rest without trekking all the way back home before the next day’s labor. But I live far enough removed from agriculture that I just don’t experience it that way. For me it is I, rather than the produce, who am being gathered in. The *sukkah* is a first gentle step in acknowledging that the time has come when I will have to live almost all of my life in human-constructed shelters, cut off from the natural world. I want to make that painful transition slowly, maybe postpone its finality for just another week. So I sit with friends and family in a little wood-frame booth, its sides all lattice paneled so I can still see through to the wonderful symphony of color outside, and prolong the joy of summer for just one more holy week.