



## Halachah Guide: Succot and More

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### The Succah

**Our goal** - For most mitzvot, one who performs the action without any particular intent still fulfills the mitzvah. However, we are taught that when using the succah, we should make sure to recall that Hashem sheltered our ancestors – in clouds of glory or in huts – on our wilderness journey from Egypt to Israel. (See Vayikra 23:43) This is a holiday of gratitude to Hashem for the miraculous protection our nation has received.

### Laws of the Succah

- A succah should have a roof of kosher *sechach* which provides more shade than sunlight.
- A succah underneath a tree may be disqualified, even if the tree only covers part of the succah; please contact me ASAP for any questions regarding this issue.
- The walls must be sturdy enough to withstand an ordinary wind. Canvas walls tend to blow easily; one should tie them down securely. Note: Because the walls of the succah must be put up before the *sechach*, one should secure the walls **before** putting up the *sechach*. And see the third tip below.
- The *sechach* must be able to remain atop the succah during ordinary winds. One may weigh down *sechach* with 2x4 beams. For questions about tying down *sechach* please contact me.
- The *sechach* should not rest on metal poles, and should not be attached with nails.
- One may not sit under decorations which hang below 14.4 inches from the *sechach*.

### Construction Tips

- If *sechach* rolls back from the end of the succah, such that there is now a gap of three tefach (10.8 inches) between the *sechach* and the wall, that wall is no longer a valid part of the succah. It may be helpful to mark off a 10.8 inch distance from the wall, to easily discern whether this is an issue.
- If there is a 10.8 inch gap in the *sechach* extending from one wall to the other, such as between *sechach* mats or poles, that splits the succah into two. One may not sit under the gap. If the succah on either side of the gap lacks the minimum size of a succah, or lacks 3 walls, that part of the succah is disqualified. To avoid this problem, it may be helpful to place extra *sechach* poles atop the *sechach*, perpendicular to it.
- To avoid the problem of blowing canvas walls, one may create a “wall within a wall” by tying strings from one corner to another, with gaps of less than 10.8 inches between each string, starting from the ground and working upward.

### The Mitzvot of Succot

**Erev Succot** – We do not start meals of bread or *mezonot* in the last quarter of the day, which is 3:40 PM this year, in order to ensure that we will have an appetite for the mitzvah meal that night. One may continue a meal that began earlier.

**Yom Tov Candles** – Shabbat and Yom Tov candles should be lit where we eat, to increase the honor and pleasure of the meal. However, one must not light candles in the succah if that could be dangerous.

One may move silver candlesticks on Yom Tov (carefully) even if they are still lit, but on Shabbat one may move them only if 1) they are no longer lit, AND 2) their space is needed, AND 3) they are on a tray that has also held an important non-muktzeh item, like challah, since before Shabbat began.

**Shehechyanu on the First Night** – On the first night, we recite *leisheiv basuccah* and then *shehechyanu*. Some reverse the order on the second night; people should follow their family customs.

## The First Meal in the Succah

- One may not make kiddush until it is 45 minutes after sunset.
- On the first two nights of Succot, one is supposed to make a special effort to sit in the succah. Just as there is a special mitzvah to eat matzah on the first two nights of Pesach, so there is a special mitzvah to live in the succah on the first two nights of Succot. One should eat a *k'beitzah* of bread (about two slices) in the succah on each of those nights. [In Israel, all of this applies only to the first night.]
- Rain
  - If it is raining, one is not truly "living in the succah," since one is supposed to live in the succah as one would in one's home. Therefore, we do not sit in the succah in the rain.
  - If it is raining at the start of either of the first two nights, with no end in sight, one should make kiddush in the succah in the rain and eat a *k'beitzah* of bread, while planning to finish the meal in the house. One recites *shehechyanu* for the Yom Tov and the construction of the succah. One does not recite *leisheiv basuccah*, since one is not truly dwelling in the succah. One should then finish the meal in the house, unless the rain stops and the succah is dry enough to conclude the meal there.
  - If it rains at the start of either of the first two nights, but it may stop in the next hour or two, one should wait for the rain to stop. If this is not possible, such as where family members or guests are very hungry or tired, one need not wait. If one waits and the rain does not stop in that time, one should follow the protocol outlined above.

## Eating in the Succah

- It is ideal to do all of one's eating in the succah, but not all eating warrants reciting *leisheiv basuccah*. One only recites this berachah when eating a meal, which is defined as eating a minimum of two slices of bread, or a similar amount of non-bread, grain-based products like cake or cookies. In the latter case one should stay in the succah for some time afterward, to justify reciting the berachah. [Some say the time period is half an hour.]
- One who is eating a meal in the succah must eat the entire meal in the succah, including foods that would not, on their own, require a succah.
- One who is pained by being in the succah is exempt. This includes those who suffer due to the temperature, the presence of pests or animals, or illness.
- There is some debate regarding whether one must make a new *leisheiv basuccah* if one starts a meal in one succah and then moves to another succah. The general practice is not to recite a new *leisheiv basuccah*.
- Some people specifically stand when reciting *leisheiv basuccah* and then sit down to eat; others sit for the berachah as well. People should follow their family custom.

**Sleeping in the Succah** – We are required to sleep in the succah (whether night or day), but one who is pained is exempt. This includes those who suffer due to the temperature, the presence of pests or animals, or illness.

## The Arba Minim ("four species")

- We do not use the *arba minim* on Shabbat.
- On the first two days of Succot, we must use *arba minim* that we own. One may give a set of *arba minim* to another adult on condition that they be returned. Note that one should not do this with a minor, since minors lack the halachic ability to transfer back the set.
- The "backbone" of the *lulav* – the thick green vertical line – faces the person holding the *lulav*. Three *hadasim* are to the right, and two *aravot* are to the left; the tops of the *hadasim* should be higher than the tops of the *aravot*. The *lulav* should extend at least four inches above the tops of the *hadasim*.
- Righties hold the *etrog* in their left hand and the *lulav* in their right; lefties do the opposite.
- For questions regarding the acceptability of the *arba minim*, please contact me.

### **Eating in the Succah on Shemini Atzeret**

There are various customs regarding sitting in the succah on Shemini Atzeret. On one hand, this day is considered like the seventh day of Succot, and we are required to sit in the succah for seven days. On the other hand, this day is also the eighth day and no longer part of Succot - and one is not allowed to add to the mitzvah of sitting in the succah for seven days.

People should follow their family custom on this matter. One who does not have an existing custom should sit in the succah for the meals of Shemini Atzeret, but not recite *leishev basuccah*.

Either way, one must wait until 45 minutes after sunset in order to recite kiddush on the night of Shemini Atzeret. Those who are not in the succah must do so to avoid eating a meal outside the succah on Succot. Those who are in the succah must do so because they will not recite the blessing on sitting in the succah.

**Seudah shlishit on the First Day of Succot and Shemini Atzeret** - We do not start meals of bread or mezonot in the last quarter of the day, which starts at 3:40 PM this year, in order to ensure that we will have an appetite for the mitzvah meal that night. This is true even for seudah shlishit. One way to do this is to abbreviate lunch, having one course and then reciting birkat hamazon, and then taking a break for 20 minutes before washing and having the rest of lunch. One who cannot start seudah shlishit before 3:40 PM may still eat it afterward, but should only eat a light meal.

**The Second Night and the Night of Simchat Torah** – One may not prepare for the second night of Yom Tov, including lighting candles and setting the table, until at least 45 minutes after sunset. (This is particularly important this year, when the first day of Succot and Shemini Atzeret are Shabbat.) The candles are lit from an existing flame.

When the first day of Succot and Shemini Atzeret are Shabbat, we recite a form of Havdalah in maariv before preparing for the second day/Simchat Torah. One who does not daven maariv should say *Baruch Hamavdil bein kodesh l'kodesh*, "Blessed be the One who distinguishes between different sanctities." Kiddush that night includes a Havdalah paragraph, and a berachah on a flame. We don't light a special Havdalah candle; instead, most people use the light of the Yom Tov candles. Some people join two of their Yom Tov candles to create a multi-wicked flame for Havdalah, but this may create halachic problems. Therefore, most people leave the candles as they are, and simply recite the berachah beside them and make use of their light that way. People should follow their family custom.

### **Dark Mornings**

In the weeks before we change the clock to Standard Time, *misheyakir* - the earliest time for tallit and tefillin - will encroach upon the start of the first weekday shacharit minyan. The issue will arise again in December. One whose work requires him to **begin davening** before *misheyakir*, and who is unlikely to fall asleep while davening, may don tefillin without a berachah as early as necessary. After *misheyakir* he should recite the berachah and touch the tefillin.

One who needs to **complete the entire davening** before *misheyakir* should don tefillin for davening without a berachah, and find a later time to don tefillin with a berachah, repeating Shema, even late in the day. If putting on tefillin later would be impossible, one may recite a berachah even before *misheyakir*.

It is preferable to recite the daily *korbanot* after sunrise, but one who is afraid of forgetting should recite them earlier.

*Thank you to Rabbi Efrem Schwalb for his Halachagrams, which informed this Guide.*