

Halacha How To's 2021:

Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot

Rosh Hashanah

Greetings: On Rosh Hashanah it's customary to greet each other with good wishes for the coming year. Two expressions often used are "K'tiva v'chatima tova" (May you be inscribed for a good year) & "Shana Tova" (Good year).

Candlelighting: We will light candles and say the blessing, 'shel Yom Tov' followed by 'Shehechyanu'.

Kiddush: The exact order for Kiddush for the 1st & 2nd nights & days of Rosh Hashanah can be found in the Artscroll siddur on pages 766 (night) & 492 (day).

Apples & Honey: After "hamotzi" is recited & the challah is eaten on each of the nights of Rosh Hashanah, we recite the "boray pri ha'etz" & eat the apple dipped in honey. On the 2nd night of Rosh Hashanah, it's also customary to eat a "new fruit," i.e. one that you haven't yet eaten this season, at this point. You can refer to page 768 in the Artscroll siddur for this & other Rosh Hashanah night customs.

Shofar Blowing: The mitzvah of hearing the shofar is the central mitzvah of Rosh Hashanah. Accordingly, we do our utmost to listen closely to the "bracha" that the shofar blower recites & to hear all 100 blasts.

The Ten Days of Repentance: These ten days, which begin with Rosh Hashanah & end with Yom Kippur, are marked by several important events & customs. Tzom Gedalia is a day of fasting & reflection. Please see the schedule for the Tzom Gedalia times. The Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur is known as Shabbat Shuva, and features one of the central drashot of the year.

Tashlich: Over the course of the 10 days of repentance, it is customary to stand near a body of flowing water (an ocean is fine) & to recite verses from the 7th chapter of the Book of Micha, which describes the way that God will "cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." If feasible, Tashlich may be recited on Rosh Hashanah, and if need be, can be recited as late as Hoshana Rabba (7th day of Sukkot). There's also a custom to throw pieces of bread onto the water, symbolizing the casting off of our sins. The liturgy for Tashlich is found in both your siddur & machzor.

Yom Kippur

Erev Yom Kippur: In the hours before Yom Kippur begins we daven Mincha including the Viduy (Confession), and then proceed to the final meal before the fast begins. The meal should be festive, including dipping challah in honey. We do not recite kiddush at this meal. The default assumption is that once you have finished the meal, you have accepted the fast. If you want to eat or drink after the meal, then you should make an explicit condition to this effect before you bentch. It is a mitzvah to add to the sanctity of Yom Kippur by "accepting the day early", and refraining from eating and from work at least some number of minutes before sunset.

Candlelighting: We will light candles and say the blessing, 'shel Yom HaKippurim' followed by 'Shehechyanu'. When you say 'Shehechyanu', you are formally accepting the prohibitions of Yom Kippur. A Yizkor candle should be lit for immediate relatives we have lost (this candle will also serve as the flame to light the candle for Havdalah).

The Prohibitions:

In addition to refraining from melacha, we also observe five extra prohibitions on Yom Kippur. They are:

1. Not eating or drinking (including no brushing of teeth). SEE EXCEPTIONS BELOW.
2. Not wearing leather shoes (synthetic leather is permitted, and some people go out of their way to wear uncomfortable shoes, as though they are barefoot)
3. Not anointing with oils or creams (non-scented spray deodorant is best)
4. Not bathing or washing hands beyond the knuckles; we ritually wash in the morning or after using the bathroom up to your knuckles; Kohanim may wash up to their wrists for duchening; A person may wash out his/her eyes in the morning.
5. We do not have marital relations with or sleep in the same bed as our spouse--Niddah restrictions apply.

Ill Individuals, Pregnant Women, and Nursing Women:

While fasting is certainly one of the central parts of Yom Kippur, it is forbidden to fast if doing so might endanger life. It is clear from the halacha, that it is just as much of a mitzvah to eat on Yom Kippur when pikuach nefesh is a concern as it is a mitzvah to fast if you are healthy. If your doctor has instructed you to not fast on account of a serious medical condition, then you should not fast. If fasting will make you seriously, potentially dangerously ill (see discussion below) you should also not fast. In both of these cases, the ideal practice is to eat and drink amounts that fall below the technical halachic threshold of "eating" and "drinking". From a Biblical (though not rabbinic) law perspective, you are still observing the fast if you remain below these thresholds. The way to do this is to eat less than 1.5 oz. (less than an olive) every 9 minutes and to drink just less than one cheekful (half a mouthful, measured beforehand) of liquid every 7 minutes. The shiurim do not add up, so food and liquid may be consumed back-to-back.

The most severe category in halacha is "someone who is ill and in danger". People who are hospitalized over Yom Kippur, and people dealing with potentially life-threatening situations are in this category, and should eat and drink as directed by their physician, and / or according to their own assessments of their needs. After that we have the category of "someone who is ill, is not in danger, but whose condition could deteriorate into something much more serious". This can include someone who is given to fainting if not properly hydrated for example. Under these circumstances, the person begins the fast, and upon sensing symptoms (i.e. the symptoms that lead to the possibly dangerous consequence), will eat and/or drink "shiurim" (prescribed amounts). The idea here is that it is possible to technically still be fasting, even while eating and/or drinking small amounts of liquid and food. If you are not sure if you fit into this category, please contact Rav Yosef or Rabbanit Alissa.

The halacha encourages all pregnant and nursing women to fast when it is not a danger to their babies or themselves. But when there is a concern for safety and health, there are circumstances in which a woman may need to eat below the thresholds, or even eat regularly on Yom Kippur. Your safety and the safety of your baby are essential to how you observe this holiday. After speaking with your doctor, if you have a concern about health and fasting, please be in touch with Rav Yosef or Rabbanit Alissa.

Kittel, White, and Tallit: On Yom Kippur, many wear a kittel (the garment we are married in and buried in) to signify our mortality and as a reminder that every moment is precious. For those who do not wear a kittel, many still have the practice of wearing white in connection with the kittel and to signify purity as well as God's forgiveness of our sins (turning the red string to white). Those who wear a tallit, should wear one at Kol Nidre. A bracha over the tallit should be recited, presuming that you don it before sundown.

Yizkor: We invite everyone to remain in our minyanim for Yizkor, but also recognize that it may be your custom to leave if, thank God, both of your parents are alive. If you do so, please (1) wait until after the prayers for the victims of the Shoah and for fallen Israeli soldiers, and (2) please remain quiet in the lobby while you wait for yizkor to finish. Yizkor may be said at home without a minyan (just not the kaddish).

Havdalah: There are two reasons given for why we recite a bracha over a flame in the ordinary, post-Shabbat havdalah. For one, we are expressing gratitude for fire on the weekly anniversary of Adam & Eve's discovery of fire at the conclusion of the very first Shabbat (Midrash). This reason doesn't pertain to havdalah following Yom Kippur. Were this the only reason given, we wouldn't recite "boray meorai ha-aysh" after Yom Kippur. The other reason states, following a 24-hour period when it is forbidden to make any use of fire, we recite the bracha to express appreciation for our being able to use it again. Yom Kippur shares the total prohibition on use of fire with Shabbat, and therefore shares this aspect of havdalah. However, the logic of this reason dictates that the bracha can only be recited over a flame that had been in existence since before the period of prohibition began, in our case, Erev Yom Kippur. Therefore, the bracha can only be recited over a yahrzeit candle, or a flame taken from a candle lit from a stove pilot (this candle is called 'ner sheshavat'). The bracha over the besamim is not recited following Yom Kippur.

Kiddush Levanah: Kiddush Levanah may be said right after Havdalah (one of the first mitzvot we can do as we start the new year with a clean slate!).

Building your Sukkah: There is a custom to start building your sukkah in the evening following your break fast - we finish one holiday by preparing for the next with joy and alacrity!

Sukkot

Lulav and Etrog: To assemble the lulav, hadasim and aravot, begin by holding the lulav so that the thick green spine is facing you. The hadasim (of which you have three) go on the right side of the lulav & the aravot (of which you have two) go on the left. The hadasim should extend just a little higher than the aravot & the lulav should extend several inches higher than the hadasim. The procedure for performing the mitzvot of lulav & etrog is as follows: We take the lulav (with the hadasim & aravot) in our right hand & the etrog -with pitum facing downward - in our left. (If we were to take the etrog right-side-up, we would at that instant be fulfilling the mitzvah before we had a chance to recite the bracha.) Then we recite the bracha "al netilat lulav" (& the first time we do this, we add "shehechyanu"). After we've recited the brachot we turn the etrog right-side-up & wave the entire package in front of us, then to the right, then behind us, then to the left, then upward & finally downward.

Waving the lulav during Hallel: During Hallel, the chazzan waves at "Hodu laHashem" and "yomar na," and again at "ana Hashem". The tzibur (congregation) waves each time they respond "hodu" and at "ana Hashem." Everyone waves twice at the last "hodu" before the concluding bracha of hallel.

Mechanics for the "hodu" waiving: Facing towards the east, simply remember: clockwise around, up and then down, which translates to forward, right, backwards, left, up, down. We do not wave the lulav when reciting God's name. This year if you are reciting Hallel at home without a minyan, you should still wave the lulav as explained above!

Sukkah Questions:

May we lay schach over a patio roof to create a valid Sukkah?

This question is addressed in Shulchan Aruch 626:3. There we learn that the slats of the patio roof are themselves considered invalid schach (as they weren't originally placed there "for the sake of creating the shade of the sukkah" - see Mishna Brura #17). However, they are no worse than any other form of invalid schach that is mixed in with valid schach. Accordingly, as long as at least 51% of the total coverage is being provided by valid schach (i.e. the schach that you lay over the patio roof), the sukkah is kosher ("kshayra" to be precise).

At what point are Sukkah walls too flimsy to be considered walls?

Interestingly, the measure of a sukkah wall's "flimsiness" is not its solidness. The laws of Sukkah, like the laws of eruv, have a very generous definition of what a wall is, allowing for much airspace. Rather, the crucial factor is the wall's ability to withstand the wind. If under normal wind conditions, a sukkah wall will be blown 8 inches from its original vertical axis in either direction, the wall is pasul (invalid). As such, if you have a canvas sukkah or the like, you need to be sure to secure the top and bottom (and if possible, the middle) as tightly as possible to insure the kashrut of the sukkah.

Palm fronds dry up as Sukkot goes along. When would the resultant airspace create a problem for your sukkah?

There are 3 ways you'd need to be concerned:

- (1) If as a result of the drying you no longer have more shade than sun in the sukkah (as measured at solar noon) than the schach must be supplemented.
- (2) If a space 8 in. wide were to open up along the entire width or length of the sukkah, the space would halachically cut your sukkah into 2 pieces. This would carry serious implications.
- (3) If an area of eight inches square were to open, no one should eat or sleep beneath that area.

Let's say you're building your sukkah using the back wall of your house as one of the sukkah walls, and your roof hangs over the back wall of the house. What impact does the overhang have on your sukkah?

The answer is, that as long as the overhang is not more than 4 "amot" long (about 6 feet), then the halacha will view it as if it is part of the back wall, i.e. the back wall is seen as suddenly turning 90 degrees, and continuing until the edge of the overhang. Thus the overhang would not figure into the kashrut of the schach (which is good news for you), but no one should sit beneath the overhang, as one can only fulfill the mitzvah of sukkah by sitting under the schach - not by sitting under the "wall."

What foods need to be eaten in a sukkah?

It is meritorious to go to the sukkah for any and all eating and drinking that we do over the holiday (including not on Yom Tov). The bottom-line halacha though permits "casual eating" outside the Sukkah, and this includes all foods over which the bracha is neither המוציא nor מוציא (such as dairy products, meat, fish, fruit and vegetables - technically even in large, meal-size quantities!). In addition, even מזונות (cake, pasta...) can be considered "casual eating" and be eaten outside of the sukkah unless:

- (1) You are eating them with other people
- (2) They are part of one of your regularly-scheduled meals

(3) You are eating a particularly large amount (a whole meal's worth)

What about when you are in your office, or on a day-long outing? The general rule is that if you wouldn't ordinarily interrupt your office-day or your day-long activity to return to your home for lunch, then you are also not required to return to your sukkah for lunch. In other words, you are exempt from the mitzvah at that time, and there are no restrictions on what you may eat (though if you wanted to limit yourself only to those foods that don't require a sukkah, you may certainly do so). However, if there is a sukkah within a reasonable distance of where you are, you are not exempt from the mitzvah, and are obligated to go to the sukkah and eat lunch there.

Finally, it's worth remembering that although women undoubtedly perform a mitzvah each time they eat in a sukkah, and recite the bracha לישב בסוכה when doing so, sukkah is a "time-bound" mitzvah from which women are granted an exemption if they so choose.

May our Chagim be filled with health, connection, inspiration, and joy!

B'ahava,

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