



Creating Live and Virtual Celebrations of Sukkot

Meaning/Purpose of Sukkot

Sukkot begins on the eve of the 15th of Tishrei (September 21, 2021), four days after the end of Yom Kippur. While it falls close to Yom Kippur, it is remarkably different from it in both mood and content. Sukkot is the third in the cycle of pilgrimage holidays (shalosh regalim).

The origin of Sukkot is articulated by Wikipedia as: "In the Book of Leviticus, God told Moses to command the people: "On the first day you shall take the product of hadar trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook" (Lev. 23:40), and **"You shall live in booths seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in booths, in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt"** (Lev. 23:42–43). *(emphasis added)*

The origins of Sukkot are both historical and agricultural. Historically, Sukkot commemorates the 40-year period during which the children of Israel wandered in the desert, living in temporary shelters. Agriculturally, Sukkot is a harvest festival and is sometimes referred to as Chag HaAsif (חַג הָאִסִּיף, the "Festival of Ingathering").^{[7][8]}

Many people build Sukkot, a Hebrew word meaning "booths" or "huts," as Jewish tradition holds that the Israelites lived in similar temporary structures during their forty years of wandering through the wilderness of Sinai. It is also our link to nature and agriculture, as farmers in ancient Israel often lived in sukkot during the fall harvest period.

In a normal year, Jews invite guests into their sukkot to socialize and enjoy this joyous season. In this year of COVID-19, how this event will be conducted will depend much on what the situation is in October, who the guests are, social distancing, etc. And, even when some or many of the restrictions are over, what we've learned from the times of conducting Virtual Celebrations, whether they were Seders or Shabbat, is that we can include many more friends and family members when we do things virtually.

Supplies / Objects You and/or Others will need

- Sukkah: It is a mitzvah (commandment) to build a sukkah for Sukkot. There are many guides on the internet on how to build a DIY (do-it-yourself) sukkah, and there are also places to order, such as the Sukkah Project (<https://www.sukkot.com/>) Also, sukkahs can be built with many materials, prefab aluminum poles, wood (2x4) structures, pvc, etc..
- The roof must be of organic material, known as s'chach, such as leafy tree overgrowth, schach mats or palm fronds – plant material that is no longer connected with the earth.[11] Prefab bamboo rolls are available through the Sukkah Project at <https://www.sukkot.com/product-category/bambooschachmats/>
- Decorations: There are so many different ways to make your sukkah festive and original. Hang fruit, dried gourds, Indian corn, and pumpkins, drape the walls with paper chains, and create special pictures representing ushpizin, harvest themes, and friends sitting in a sukkah together.
- **Create a welcome banner for the entrance to your Sukkah.** Get ready for your holiday meal by creating dishes that are made with fruits and vegetables that we typically find during the fall season.
- Sukkahs are a wonderful way to have children (if you have such, and whatever their age) to participate in the building and/or decoration. Have them share designs and ideas online with their friends - kids could even put together a presentation together with friends that they could show on a virtual Sukkot seder.

Timetable for Preparing for and Observance of Holiday / Practice

Normally as soon after the conclusion of Yom Kippur as possible, often on the same evening, one is enjoined to begin building the sukkah. If this will be a 'first time' you'll need to order / assemble the materials to build your sukkah sufficiently in advance.

Links to Videos and Other Resources which can assist you in Getting Ready

- Sukkah Building with Mayim Bialik <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CK-0c50Si5w>
- Building a PVC Sukkah <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmAY9ng8HbE>
- The Do's and Don'ts of Sukkah Building <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sm-qORdTyBM>

Your Invitation:

It is a tradition to invite guests to sit and dwell in your sukkah (usually by eating a meal). This year you may only have a few if any guests, but you can still invite people to share

a sukkah meal virtually if they have their own sukkah, and if they don't you can still invite them to share a meal virtually.

Assigning parts / roles to participants so that they feel more a part of the celebration

There are many prayers that you can say on Sukkot as you prepare for the meal, in this order. Some of them might be said in each location by the individual household, and others can be assigned to an individual to lead or recite alone depending on your practice (designated by an asterisk).

Before reciting Kiddush in the sukkah on the first and second nights of Sukkot (page 334), or before reciting the blessing over bread and beginning the meal on the other evenings of the Festival, it is customary to invite these special guests, called in Aramaic ushpizin, to feast with us in our sukkah. Although all the names are mentioned each evening, each night we issue a special invitation to one set of guests. The Zohar, the classic book of Jewish mysticism, mentions that seven distinguished leaders join the righteous in the sukkah: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, and David (Emor 103b–104a). Isaac Luria, the Ari, of Safed (sixteenth century) created the ritual of inviting guests according to the formula found on these pages. To the seven guests mentioned in the Zohar, modern liturgists have added worthy women: Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, and Ruth. An eighth pair — Solomon and Esther — are also added by those whose custom it is to eat in the sukkah also on Sh'mini Atzeret. The order of guests that we follow in this siddur, unlike the Zohar's order, is chronological.

Ask your children whom they would like to invite into the sukkah and have them share the reasons for their choices. Encourage them to think broadly and include historical figures, family members, friends, and anyone of interest or importance in their lives.

If you are organizing an online Sukkot seder, share a list of the ushpizin with other families and include all the kids in the families in this discussion.

Adapting this traditional Jewish Observance to a Virtual / Zoom / Conferencing Software

Since most people are using Zoom for their gatherings with friends and family, this guide will focus on that software, but other software will have most of the same issues. There are various technical considerations that will determine what is the best approach.

- Are you eating in the Sukkah? [Even if not all your guests have a Sukkah to eat in, that should not stop them from **eating outdoors**. Such will make the experience at least a little more meaningful to them.]
- Does your Internet WiFi connection reach the sukkah? [This may be the 'most important factor at having a Virtual Sukkah celebration. This is something you'll want to test in the days prior to the holiday, i.e., setting up a Zoom session with a 'long distant friend or family member' to check your signal.] One thing which we would suggest, is that while wireless is very convenient, it is not always as strong as a wired/Ethernet connected signal. And, although many modern computers may not have an Ethernet port, there are USB/Ethernet connectors ([example](#)) which would allow you to connect via USB to your computer, and with an Ethernet cord of 100 feet (which is not very expensive - [example](#)), will allow you to reach your Sukkah directly from your router with the strongest signal possible.
- If not, do you have a mobile device on a cell connection that functions in your sukkah?

Virtual Software Issues:

- Virtual software, because the bandwidth / connections of the various parties are not all of the same strength, doesn't lend itself to group singing. The lag and potential drops in signals will make what would be a wonderful addition, often into a somewhat irritating sound.

Adding to the Ceremony / Ritual, because of Zoom, which you might not normally do.

- Because every sukkah and decorations are unique, and your guests are virtual, and can't 'look around' your sukkah, you might want to bring your camera around to the different elements of the sukkah for your guests to see, and tell them why you've added such to the sukkah. [for example, one person decorated his sukkah with laminated pictures of historically important rabbis, i.e., Rashi, Maimonides, his own synagogue's rabbi, and because he is a Stephen Sondheim (the Broadway lyricist and composer) fan, he laminated a picture of Mr. Sondheim, and labeled it *Reb Stephen of Sondheim*), which frequently got a smile from his guests. **Go ahead, and make YOUR sukkah decorations personal.**

Activities for families and kids:

For an additional mitzvah and to incorporate themes of Tikkun Olam into your holiday celebration, ask the other people on your virtual Sukkot meal to donate food to local food pantries that are so in need once the holiday is over, or make a contribution to an organization that works to end hunger, like Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger.

Read fun Sukkot stories as a family, or pick a book about Sukkot to have kids in all the families participating in the virtual Sukkot read, and then talk about online.

Some favorites:

- o Sammy Spider's First Sukkot by Sylvia A. Rouss
- o Tamar's Sukkah by Ellie Gellman
- o It's Sukkah Time! By Latifa Berry Kropf
- o Bubbe Isabella and the Sukkot Cake by Kelly Terwilliger
- o The Mysterious Guests: A Sukkot Story by Eric A. Kimmel

Blessings which are a part of this celebration (in Hebrew, Transliterated and English)

We are providing the 'traditional' blessings which are used during this celebration in Hebrew, Transliterated (Hebrew, but typed in English letters) and English, so that no matter what your Jewish Literacy is, you can make this celebration / tradition, a part of your family history. Blessing of children in the English translation, if that is where you are most comfortable with now, is still participating in this time-tested Jewish ritual. If and when you become comfortable with the Hebrew - whether reading from the Hebrew or the transliterated text, you can take that next step.

- Lighting Candles
- Invitation to the Ushpizin (see attachment)
- Reciting the Special Kiddush (first and second night)
- Blessing for sitting in the sukkah
- Washing Hands
- Chanting Hamotzi (a blessing over the bread)
- Blessing for the lulav
- Birkat Hamazon



BLESSING OVER THE CANDLES

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
Asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav,
V'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel (Shabbat v'shel)
Yom Tov.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק
וְצִוָּנוּ גַּרְשָׁל (שַׁבָּת וְשֵׁל) יוֹם טוֹב.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe whose mitzvot add holiness to our lives
and who gave us the mitzvah to kindle lights for (Shabbat and for) the Festival.

After lighting the candles, you say Shehecheyanu to thank God for enabling us to reach this season.

SHEHECHEYANU

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
Shehecheyanu v'kimanu v'higi-anu laz'man
hazeh.*

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם,
שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, for keeping us alive, for sustaining us,
and for helping us to reach this season.

Welcoming the Ushpizin: See attachment

Kiddush: We sanctify the holiday with the special kiddush for Sukkot. As with other festivals, it is traditional to say the shehecheyanu again after the kiddush and before drinking.

BLESSING OVER THE WINE

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
Borei p'ri hagafen.*

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם,
בורא פרי הגפן.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates fruit of the vine.

KIDDUSH

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
asher bachar banu mikol am
v'rom'manu mikol lashon, v'kid'shanu
b'mitzvotav. Va-teeten lanu Adonai Eloheinu
b'ahavah (Shabbatot lim'nucha u)
Moadim l'simcha, chagim uz'manim l'sason, et
Yom (haShabbat hazeh v'et yom) chag hasukot
hazeh, z'man simchateinu (b'ahava) mikro
kodesh zeicher l'tziat mitzrayim. Ki vanu
vacharta v'otanu kidashta mikol ha'amim,
(v'Shabbat) uMoadei kod-sh'cha (b'ahava
uvratzon) b'simcha uv'sason hinchaltanu.
Baruch atah Adonai, m'kadeish (haShabbat v')
Yisrael v'hazmanim*

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם,
אשר בחר בנו מכל עם ורוממנו
מכל לשון, וקדשנו במצוותיו.
ותתן לנו יי אלהינו באהבה
(שבתות למנוחה ומועדים
לשמחה, חגים וזמנים לששון,
את-יום (השבת הזה ואת-יום)
חג הסוכות הזה, זמן שמחתנו, (באהבה),
מקרא קדש זכר לציאת מצרים.
כי בנו בחרת, ואותנו קדשית
מכל העמים, (ושבת) ומועדי קדש
(באהבה ובכבוד) בשמחה ובששון
הנחלתנו. ברוך אתה יי מקדש
(השבת ו) ישראל והזמנים.

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Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe who has chosen and distinguished us by sanctifying our lives with Commandments. In love have You given us, O'Lord our God, (Sabbaths for rest) appointed times for gladness, festivals and season for joy, even (this Sabbath day and) this Festival of Sukkot, the season of our gladness. It is for us (in love) a holy convocation, commemorating the Exodus from Egypt. You have chosen us of all peoples for your service, and You have given us a sacred purpose in life. Therefore you gave us (with loving favor) in gladness and joy, Your holy (Shabbat and) festivals as a heritage. Praise are You, O God, who hallows (the Shabbat,) Israel, and the festivals.

SHEHECHEYANU

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
Shehecheyanu v'kimanu v'higi-anu laz'man
hazeh.*

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם,
שהחיינו וקימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, for keeping us alive, for sustaining us, and for helping us to reach this season.

BLESSING FOR SITTING IN THE SUKKAH



*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
Asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, V'tzivanu lei-shev
ba-sukkah.*

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם,
אשר קדשנו במצותיו, וצונו לישב בסכה.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments and commanded us to dwell in the sukkah.

BLESSING FOR WASHING THE HANDS

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech
ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav
vtzivivanu al n'tilat yadayim.*

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם,
אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על
נטילת ידים.



Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe,
who has sanctified us with commandments and has commanded us to wash our hands.

HAMOTZI



*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
Hamotzi lechem min ha-aretz*

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם,
המוציא לחם מן הארץ.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe,
Who brings forth bread from the earth.

BLESSING FOR THE LULAV

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav vtzvivanu al n'tilat
lulav.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל
נְטִילַת לֻלָב.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe,
who has sanctified us with commandments and has commanded us to wave the lulav.