

Leishev ba-Sukkah: Between Ashkenaz and Sepharad

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The contrast between Sukkot and Pesah may be grasped through the formulas of their blessings. The blessing for eating matzah concerns a single and specific act. Therefore it uses the formula containing the term *al*: *al akhilat matzah*, rather than *le-ekhol matzah*. Dwelling in the sukkah represents a whole procedure and system of habitation—rather than a specific act. Accordingly, the formula containing the prefix ל is used, and the blessing takes the form *leishev basukkah*, rather than *al yeshivat sukkah*. For there is a radical difference between eating matzah at the *seder*, and eating in the sukkah. In the former, the act of eating is the mitzvah, whereas in the latter, the actual mitzvah is expressed in *dwelling* in the sukkah; eating is merely an instance of dwelling. Therefore although in rabbinic law "eating" is generally measured by a *kezayit*, one may eat outside the sukkah about *ke'beitzah*,¹ which is the measure that one would usually eat as *akhilat arai*, i.e., outside a dwelling. And to underline the principle that the obligation is to *dwell* in the sukkah, rather than just to eat, Sephardim after the first night first bless *leishev* and then *ha-motzi*—unlike Ashkenazim who always say *ha-motzi* first. Only on the first night do Sephardim say *ha-motzi* before *leishev ba-sukkah*, so as to include the sukkah in the blessing of *she-he-hiyyanu*.

Ikkar Mitzvat Sukkah

There are several halakhic consequences to the preceding. Rabbeinu Tam regards eating in the sukkah as *ikkar ha-mitzvah*—Accordingly, he restricted the blessing of the sukkah to eating, excluding all other activities pertaining to dwelling, such as sleeping or sitting. On the other hand, for the Geonim and Maimonides, the obligation is "to dwell"—not merely "to eat" in the sukkah. This is why they required a blessing upon sitting, sleeping, and other activities included in the concept of "dwelling."² In practice, however, because of the principles that *berakhot einan me'akvot*, and *safek berakhot le'hakeil*, the standard custom among Sephardim is to follow Rabbeinu Tam's view, and pronounce the blessing only when eating. In substantive matters, however, Sephardim follow the view of Maimonides and the Geonim.

When it Rains on the First Night

Let us consider the following case: According to the Rosh and other authorities, even when it rains in the first night (or two nights in the diaspora) there is an obligation to eat in the sukkah. This position reflects Rabbeinu Tam's view that somehow the obligation to *eat* in the sukkah is not intrinsically connected with the obligation to *dwell* in the sukkah. Therefore, although because of the rain one is exempted from sleeping, etc., in the sukkah, one would still be obligated to eat there. This is the opinion codified by the Rema (639:5). Other authorities, however, among them Maran Joseph Caro, maintain that when it is raining there is no obligation to eat in the sukkah even on the first night of the holiday.³ The legal theory underlying this position is consistent with the view that the actual obligation is to *dwell*; consequently there could be no

independent obligation to eat (but not to dwell!) A similar theory may underlay the custom of many Sephardim when there is no sukkah available for the Shabbat meal during Sukkot. In such a case they would say the *kiddush* and eat the Shabbat meal in their homes, but they would be careful not to eat more than a *ke'beitzah*. Even if one were to apply the principle *Shabbar kova'at le'inyan terumot u-ma'asrot* to the regular meals of Shabbat and Holidays,⁴ leading one to question whether such eating would constitute a proper *seudah*, still this would not affect the status of the meal on Sukkot. It is only if one regards *eating* in the sukkah as the principle obligation (as Rabbeinu Tam holds) that it would be relevant to know whether eating *pahot mi-shiur*, etc., acquires the status of *seudat keva* by virtue of Shabbat. If, however, the only criterion for sukkah is *yeshivat keva/arai*, as maintained by Maimonides and the Geonim, then it is irrelevant what the status of the meal *per se* is: the criterion for *akhilat keva/arai* depends on whether or not it is part of *dirat keva/arai*—not the other way around. A further consequence of this distinction is that if one were to regard *eating* as the principle obligation of the sukkah, there would be no basis to distinguish it from Pesah: since in both cases the obligation to eat is only at night, then either the blessing for the sukkah should be pronounced only on the first night(s), or else we should pronounce the blessing for the matzah during all seven days of Pesah.

The Sukkah as Paradigm of this Life

The foregoing may serve to illustrate a deeper symbolism that inheres in the sukkah. For the sukkah can be said to symbolize perfectly the temporal dimension of earthly existence. The struggle of the Israelites in their wandering through the desert to reach the Promised Land may serve as a paradigm to all humans struggling to fulfill their individual purpose. Appropriately, like earthly life itself, the sukkah must be *dirat arai*, a temporary dwelling—not a permanent one. As the proverbial *seventy* years of the biblical lifespan, we are to inhabit this temporary dwelling for *seven* days. The fruits of our toil, represented by Simhat Torah, must be enjoyed ultimately *outside* the sukkah. As the rabbis taught in another context, *sekhar mitzvah be'hai alma leika*—there is no (complete) reward for fulfillment of the Torah in this world.⁵ Finally, the sukkah itself became the symbol of trust in Divine guidance and care. Thus the expression *sukkat shelomekha*, used in the liturgy, comes to express the special care and exquisite solicitude that God has for those who let themselves be guided by Him. □

1. See Maimonides, M.T. Hil. Sukkah 6:6, Sukkah 26a, and Rosh 2:13. For a precise analysis of the subject, see R. Moses b Habib, *Tosafot Yom ha-Kippurim* on Yoma 79b, s.v. Tosafot.
2. See Tur and bet Yosef #639
3. See R. Ovadya Yosef, *Yalkut Yosef*, 5:140, n. 14
4. See R. Hida, *Birkei Yosef*, *Orah Hayyim* 167:5; idem, *Hayyim Sha'al*, part 1, 78.
5. *Kiddushin* 39b



For more content from Hakham Jose Faur and his son Rabbi Abe H Faur, please visit www.MoreshetSepharad.org and search 'Torat Andalus' on YouTube.

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