



## FACING THE FUTURE IN YOUR SUCCAH

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There is a school of design called “Minimalist.” The perceived beauty of this style is its simplicity. There are no elaborate carvings, just plain, functional lines. Those who extol this type of design say it wipes away all of life’s clutter and brings things into sharper focus. Minimalist design, they say, brings out the essential, the beauty without the frills. A word to the wise: Not only will your house be unencumbered by decorating in this style, but your bank account as well. With this style, everything becomes simple and uncluttered — except the designer’s wallet!

I’m far from an expert about such things, but I can understand where they’re coming from. Once a year, we Jews all over the world go into their backyard and build minimalist abodes. We don’t add much inside by way of furniture, except perhaps a sturdy table, some chairs and a folding bed. It must be the original minimalist housing, and it preceded the big name designers by some two thousand years or so. In fact, the true designer of these small, uncluttered homes is the Creator of the world Himself, for it is in keeping with His mitzvos that we build them.

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In certain areas, though, we do permit a measure of extravagance: succah decorations. They can actually take on a sophistication that would turn those fancy designers green with envy. There is a certain science to decorating a succah; certain rules to follow. Before you can start, you must know which customs the succah’s owner follows.

Like most things Jewish, the world of succah decorations is replete with options about what should and shouldn't be used. Some say not to hang anything from the schach; others say, "Why not?" One succah will have a few apples and nuts dangling from ancient string, while its next-door neighbour will be festooned with glittering bulbs that twinkle and turn. It's all part of the rich tapestry that makes up Torah life.

Family Rubin, like most families, has inherited several customs. Post-War America saw people from different communities joining together as no other generation had in the past. Litvish, Chassidish, you name it, they all melded together, and with this came a whole new understanding of which family customs were vital and which could be sacrificed in the name of shalom bayis. Of course, there is always the third way, that is where one tries to mix everything together, giving each part of the family some comfort. My Rebbetzin is the product of razor-sharp, sharfa Polish Chassidim, combined with the dignity of Litvish rabbonim. This has been welded to yours truly, third generation Yankee who studied in Chassidische yeshivas of America. After all these wonderful years together, we have succah decorating down to perfection. We let the grandchildren do it!

One thing the kids do that I find very inspiring is they hang up pictures of tzaddikim. Let me explain why I find this so special. The succah is where we go after the soul cleansing of Rosh Hashonoh and Yom Kippur. We enter its plain environs with a clean slate, and we sit down and find ourselves gazing at the stars as they peep through the chinks in the schach. All is calm. We can face our inner selves and ask where we want to go. We are able, for these few days, to communicate the aspirations of our souls. There is nothing cluttering up our view because all the furniture of our everyday lives has been left inside the house.

People, as we know, think in pictures, not words. Our mind envisions what we want and what we fear. Sitting in a succah, what better vision is there to keep in front of our eyes than that of a Gutte Yid from past times? It is often said that such visual input is vital for the young. Their minds are not yet set and the stimulus of seeing holy faces can give them a positive example for their own identity.

However, we don't speak enough about how important such visions are for adults as well. It may not sound very mature or rabbinic, but I can look at pictures of our holy leaders all day. In our home, we have several pictures of my Rebbes hanging in every room. They are usually pictures that were taken by photographers who did so surreptitiously, often as not in the midst of the tzaddik's avodah. While looking at their faces, I find a certain calm coming over me, a calm mingled with a deep desire to be a better Jew. There is no better starting point than in the succah, where new beginnings can start with visions of those who inspired our past.

There is yet another dynamic at work. We live in times where there is great pressure on each of us to be impressed with those who seem to be prosperous, despite their cleaving to a path that is contradictory to our Torah. The materialism of this world screams out at every corner and at every

turn. Our young are deluged with images foreign to Torah values. Technology has opened up a world that can be carried in the hand, a world not always wholesome or beneficial. Sitting in the succah, away from the distractions of the everyday may be the perfect setting to discuss with our young, and in fact with one another, how to relate to this growing problem. Like so much more in life, each family will have to face this challenge, given its unique composition, but face it we must, and there is no better family setting than in the quiet of the succah's hallowed walls. We can sit in the succah, live in its beautiful yet basic environment, and gaze at the image of those tzaddikim who led Yidden out of the morass and into the oases of our Torah.

Each generation must face its unique challenge, and for the Yied, the succah has always been the source of renewed strength and bitochon.