

Sepharadim

Living in an Ashkenazi Community



Shema beni mussar avicha: Shelomo HaMelekh adjures us to preserve our communal heritage and traditions — significant elements of our identity. In our diverse American communities, Sepharadim are blessed to live in some communities that have a strong Ashkenazi identity. Is it possible for a Sepharadi to be a part of the community while following Sephardic traditions, or are the differences too far apart?

Overall, Sephardic communities adhere strictly to the rulings of the *Shulchan Aruch*, with specific communities placing more emphasis on the Rambam, Arizal, and Chida. Oftentimes these halachot are unknown, overlooked, or perceived to be impossible to maintain in an Ashkenazi world, but some familiarity and forethought can go a

long way to make it easy, manageable, and maintainable.¹ Below is a brief survey of some of these halachot with some simplified citations for further enrichment.

Tefillah

1. Although the Torah prohibits us from creating subsects within a community by being different, *lo titgodedu* is not as significant of a prohibition for Sepharadim as it is for Ashkenazim. Due to the well-known nature of the differences between Sepharadim and Ashkenazim, among other factors, one does not need to conform to our surroundings at the expense of our own *minhagim* (*Yabia Omer* 6 OC 10). [See also the excellent monographs *Tal Imrati*,



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by R' Tal Doar of Sanhedria, and *Banim Chavivim* by R' Eli Yanay of Lakewood for full comprehensive expositions of this topic.]

2. One should pronounce the words according to his own custom, not the Ashkenazi pronunciation (*Yabia Omer* 6 OC 11, *Yechaveh Daat* 7:150).
3. Ideally, Sepharadim should always pray in their own minyan, given the

¹ See Rashi, Bereshit 32:5.

primacy of *Nusach Edot HaMizrach*. Certainly, one who must pray with Ashkenazim should still pray from his own siddur and avoid being *shaliach tzibbur* (Chida, *Yabia Omer* 6 OC 10, *Yechave Daat* 4:36 and 6:6, *Ohr LeTzion* 2:7:38).

4. A single boy may wear a tallit in an Ashkenazi yeshiva where nobody else is doing so (*Vayashov HaYam* 1:5).
5. Prevalent Sephardic practice is to sit for Kaddish. In an Ashkenazi congregation, one may sit for Kaddish as long as he does not stick out. For example, if there are elderly Ashkenazim who are not standing, people still reciting Tachanun, learning Torah, etc. then one does not have to stand, since he is not the only one sitting. If he was standing at the beginning of Kaddish, he should remain standing. (*Yechaveh Daat* 3:4, *Ohr LeTzion* 2:5:9).
6. The mourner's kaddish may be recited according to the Sephardic text, but one may abbreviate the *Yehe Shelama Rabbah* section as the Ashkenazim do in order to keep up with other mourners (*Yalkut Yosef* 56:25, *Ohr LeTzion* 2:5:11).
7. Without a minyan reciting the 13 Middot ("*Vaya'avor*") together, one should either recite the pasuk with the *te'amim* (cantillation) or just skip it altogether (*Yalkut Yosef* 131:14).
8. According to Chacham Ovadia Yosef, just as Sephardic women do not recite berachot on lulav or

shofar, they should also not recite *Baruch She'amar*, *Yishtabach*, or *Birkot Keriat Shema* with Hashem's name, as they are exempt. Those Sephardim who are lenient on lulav and shofar are also lenient with these parts of tefillah (*Yechaveh Daat* 3:3; *Yabia Omer* 2:6, 8:8, 9:108:28 and 32; *Ohr LeTzion* 2:5:3).

Shabbat

1. Sephardim should not light Shabbat candles if there are already other Shabbat candles lit in the same room. If one is a guest with the privacy of his/her own bedroom, and the host is lighting in the dining room, it is best to light in the bedroom (with a beracha). Given the potential fire hazard and host discomfort, one should use a (preferably incandescent) night light (and if needed to turn off, a timer) and recite a beracha on the night light (*Shulchan Aruch* OC 263:8; *Chazon Ovadia*, Shabbat vol. 1 page 203).
2. Any bread that is sweet or hard and crunchy is *Mezonot*, not *Hamotzi* according to most Sephardic posekim (*Shulchan Aruch* OC 168:7, *Yabia Omer* 10 OC 18, *Ohr LeTzion* 2:12:4). As such, when visiting an Ashkenazi family (Ashkenazim consider sweet or crunchy bread to be *Hamotzi*) one should bring along pitas or ask his host to also have a bag of pitas or other water-based challah available

for *Hamotzi*. Afterwards, one can enjoy the host's egg challah.

3. Ashkenazim and Sephardim each have many stringencies and leniencies in the realm of cooking and heating food on *Shabbat*. Each should familiarize himself with and follow his own tradition; nevertheless, each may certainly eat from the other's kitchen on *Shabbat* (*Shulchan Aruch* OC 252, 253, 318).

Moadim

1. One should expend extra effort to spend *Selichot*, *Rosh Hashanah*, and *Yom Kippur* in a Sephardic *Minyan* in order to pray in a minyan that is aligned with Sephardic custom (*Yalkut Yosef*, OC 582:1, *Shemesh uMagen* 4:72).
2. On *Chanukah*, only one *chanukiah* is lit per family (*Shulchan Aruch* OC 671:2). After the head of household lights the first candle, some say the children may light the remaining candles (*Chazon Ovadia* pg. 21).
3. One may only purchase *kitniot* products for *Pesach* that are approved by a recognized *kashrut* organization as being truly *chametz* free. The OU and JSOR do a great service by providing this information. In general, a woman must follow her husband's customs and *halachot*. [It should be noted that for an Ashkenazi woman marrying a Sephardic man, eating *kitniot* is a relatively insignificant change compared to the changes that relate to prayer, *Shabbat*, and *kashrut* that are relevant on a daily or weekly basis.] A Sephardi can cook for an Ashkenazi in his *kasher lepesach kitniot* utensils (Rav Schachter).



See more shiurim & articles from Rabbi Djavaheri at www.yutorah.org/teachers/rabbi-mordechai-djavaheri/

4. Sukkahs with canvas walls are insufficient for the mitzvah. One should ensure in advance that there are hard walls or elastic straps that can create halachically suitable walls (*Yechaveh Daat* 3:46, *Yabia Omer* OC 9:59, *Chazon Ovadiah*, Sukkot pg 1-5).

Kashrut

1. Ideally, one should only purchase meat that is *cholak Bet Yosef*. If one is eating in someone else's home, he may rely on a *safek sefekah* (double doubt) to eat without asking (*Yabia Omer* 5 YD 3).
2. Perhaps the most difficult issue for a Sephardi in an Ashkenazi community to navigate is eating at restaurants. For Ashkenazim, *bishul akum* is easily avoided by having the mashgiach ignite the flame on the stove or oven; for Sephardim, the food must be more actively cooked by a Jew, such as by putting it on the fire. Given this is not at all economical in our restaurants, they are basically all off limits unless one relies on a major leniency issued by Chacham Ovadia for restaurants owned by Jewish people, by combining various lenient opinions (*Yechaveh Daat* 5:54).
3. Glass does not absorb or emit taste, so one could have one set of glass dishes for both meat and

dairy as long as they are cleaned well in between, and it would not need to be kashered for Pesach (*Yechaveh Daat* 1:6). However, since Ashkenazim act strictly in this regard, one should not serve Ashkenazim dairy food on plates he used for meat or vice versa (Rav Schachter).

Life Cycles

1. Sephardim have a number of differences in their *ketubot*, and many rabbanim advise making sure to use a Sephardic Ketubah and not just a modified Ashkenazi one (Rav Shlomo Amar).
2. Two *panim chadashot* (new people) are required for Sheva Berachot, but they can be anyone who did not eat bread at the wedding (and will eat bread now) (*Shulchan Aruch* EH 62:7).
3. Yichud room is best omitted from the wedding (*Yabia Omer* vol. 5 EH 8). This can be difficult for a Sephardi chattan who attends an Ashkenazi yeshiva where it is commonplace to have a yichud room or if the kallah is Ashkenazi and expects it. Peer pressure comes from all sides.
4. Many are of the view that, at any Sheva Berachot event that takes place outside the home of the new couple, one may not recite more

than just Hagefen and Asher Bara; many disagree. Each should consult with his rabbi and follow his community custom.

5. Strictly speaking, a woman should cover her hair with a hat or scarf (*mitpachat*) not a wig (*Yabia Omer* 5 EH 5); many are lenient. For a woman who lives in a predominantly Ashkenazi community, wearing a *mitpachat* can be challenging and the women of the community (as well as her husband) should be sensitive to this.

Closing

Rabbi Haim Jachter's *Bridging Traditions: Demystifying Differences Between Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews*, and Rabbi Yonatan Nacson's upcoming *Mimizrach uMiMa'arav* are great resources where these issues are discussed at length. Rabbi Nacson's *Laws of Shabbat*, *Laws of the Holidays*, and *Laws of Niddah* are great handbooks for every Sephardic home.

In closing, with a little time, effort, and pita (and a little less takeout), it's very possible to maintain our traditions in communities that want to be united but not uniform. Be'ezrat Hashem, with the right motivation and information, we can succeed in imparting on our traditions to generations to come.

