

Sukkah 101

Laws of the Jewish Holidays
in a Simple and Concise Language

- ❖ **Permitted Sukkah Materials**
- ❖ **Building the Sukkah**
- ❖ **Assembling the Sukkah**
- ❖ **Performing the Mitzvah**
 - Eating in the Sukkah
 - “Leisheiv Basukkah”
 - Living in the Sukkah
 - Rain
 - The First Two Nights
- ❖ **Sukkah Exclusivity**

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אשירה לד' כי גמל עלי¹

I am indebted to my wife for all the patience and support she continues to have for me.

Thank you my dear reader, for without your interest this pamphlet would not exist.

Much thanks as well to the Minneapolis Community Kollel for their resources.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to be a quick review of some pertinent laws relevant to this time of year.
It was formulated for those who do not have the opportunity or resources to study the laws in detail.

Many of these laws are drawn from the sefer:

ספר הסוכה השלם by Rabbi Eliyahu Weissfish

If you have any feedback please share it with me at yochanan.schnall@gmail.com.

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Building the Sukkah

❖ Permitted Sukkah Materials

Walls

- Sukkah walls may be created from any material² but they must be constructed to be firm and stable³.
 - A stable structure is one that would not shake from normal gusts of wind. It is irrelevant whether any wind is actually blowing on it or not.⁴
 - This concern is especially relevant when using walls made of fabric (such as canvas or sheets). If you have this type of sukkah, show it to a rabbi⁵.
- It is improper to use s'chach that has a foul smell.⁶ This could be an issue if mold or mildew is present.

S'chach

S'chach is made from items that grew from the ground but are currently detached. Many complex laws govern s'chach and it is advisable to use the standard materials to avoid any complications. These include evergreen branches, dried bamboo, thrushes or simple, unfinished narrow wooden slats. Ask a rabbi before using any other material.

- S'chach cannot be used while it is bundled and bound together⁷.
- Tree branches are a problem if its leaves rapidly dry out and fall off. Acceptable s'chach must be able to provide sufficient shade for the entire holiday⁸. (see below for the necessary volume of shade)
- S'chach is invalid if it sheds needles or leaves so constantly that the sukkah becomes an unpleasant environment.⁹
- It is improper to use s'chach that has a foul smell¹⁰. This could be an issue if mold or mildew is present.
- We do not use materials that are commonly used to construct a roof¹¹. Therefore, although wooden beams may be used to support s'chach, using them as the actual s'chach could be a concern.
- Not all bamboo mats are valid for s'chach. Before purchasing one, clarify its status with a rabbi.

S'chach Density

- Ideal s'chach density is a thickness through which stars can be seen or sunlight can stream¹².
- S'chach is not ideal if rain cannot penetrate it because of the s'chach's density¹³.
- The minimum permitted s'chach density is a volume that shades an average of half the sukkah floor surface¹⁴.

❖ Assembling the Sukkah

Walls

At least three sides of the sukkah must be enclosed with walls¹⁵. Today, the custom is that all sides of the sukkah are enclosed¹⁶.

- Sukkah walls do not need to be exclusive- they can be part of an existing house or fence etc.
- There is no preference regarding who should build the sukkah walls¹⁷.

S'chach

- S'chach should be put into place by an adult Jewish male, but this is not obligatory¹⁸.
- It is proper for the homeowner to be involved in building the sukkah, at least for laying down some s'chach¹⁹.
- S'chach is to be laid for the purpose of creating a sukkah, or at least with the intent to provide shade²⁰.
 - When a worker lays down s'chach because he was hired to build a sukkah, it qualifies as a proper intent.

- At least three sides of the sukkah must be standing before any s'chach is put into place. If s'chach was placed down before then, it must be removed and replaced after the walls are assembled²¹
 - This concern is especially relevant when building a canvas sukkah. After erecting the metal frame, at least three walls must be spread and in place before placing down any s'chach.
- It is ideal that the s'chach should not rest on any metal, plastic or fabric items²². These entities should not secure the s'chach either²³.
 - Some ideal entities for s'chach to rest on are wooden beams or plywood.
- S'chach does not necessarily have to reach the sukkah walls. With various rules in place, s'chach may rest on a frame that extends to the walls, and at times, even a narrow gap is acceptable. If your s'chach will be laid in this manner, consult a rabbi.²⁴

Location

- The sukkah must be under the open sky.²⁵ Any tree branches or overhangs that project above a sukkah could invalidate it²⁶. If you have this circumstance and the problem cannot be removed, consult a rabbi. (Speak to him before laying down any s'chach.)
- Hashem instructs us to live in the sukkah throughout the holiday. Therefore, the sukkah should be in a location that maximizes comfort as much as is practically possible.
- The sukkah should not be situated on another individual's property or on public property without permission²⁷.

General

- Those who live in a location where it is impossible to build a sukkah (such as an apartment building) are still obligated in the mitzvah. It is incumbent upon them to find a sukkah that they can use for the holiday²⁸.
- The size of a sukkah must accommodate those who will be using it as well as the majority of the table they will be using²⁹.
- Halacha considers items that are borrowed without permission as theft. Using any such item as part of a sukkah, could invalidate the sukkah³⁰.
- A mezuzah is not placed on the entrance of the sukkah³¹. Of course, if the sukkah is built adjacent to a home, the mezuzah on the doorway of the house remains in place³².
- The sukkah may not be assembled on Shabbos or Yom Tov³³. In fact, on those days everything associated with the sukkah is muktzah. See below in **Sukkah Exclusivity** for more details on this subject.
 - If a sukkah fell down on Shabbos or Yom Tov and there is no sukkah to use as an easy alternate, a non-Jew may be asked to reassemble it.³⁴ It is not necessary to be ambiguous when making this request.

Decorations

It is a mitzvah to beautify the sukkah³⁵.

- When hanging decorations from s'chach, the bottom of the decoration should not hang lower than fifteen inches from the s'chach³⁶.
 - Lights that hang from the s'chach are not subject to this limitation³⁷.

Shlok

Many people build a cover to spread over the s'chach for when it rains; the Yiddish term for this cover is a "shlok". While a shlok is spread out, the sukkah is not fit for use³⁸.

- S'chach cannot be laid down while the shlok is spread out³⁹.

- When Yom Tov begins, the shlok should not be covering the s'chach⁴⁰ (unless it is raining).
- Throughout the holiday, the shlok should remain in the open position unless rain is anticipated⁴¹.
- It is important to discern if the shlok partially covers some s'chach when it is in the open position. In that case, whoever sits directly under it is considered as sitting under invalid s'chach⁴².

❖ Performing the Mitzvah

- The Torah states that the purpose of this mitzvah is to remind us of how Hashem sheltered us in a sukkah of clouds after He took us out of Egypt⁴³ and this should be in our minds while we use the sukkah. If it was forgotten, the mitzvah is still fulfilled⁴⁴.
- Men and boys over bar mitzvah have a Torah obligation to eat in the sukkah when applicable.
 - Boys must be trained to perform the mitzvah of sukkah once they are old enough to understand its concept⁴⁵. This is usually when they are five or six⁴⁶.
- Women are exempt from this mitzvah⁴⁷ -they may of course perform it if they wish.
- Someone who is unwell or experiencing a discomfort due to conditions in the sukkah might be exempt from the obligation. A rabbi should be consulted⁴⁸.

Eating in the Sukkah

It is praiseworthy to eat exclusively in the sukkah throughout the holiday⁴⁹. The actual obligation though depends on the food type and manner in which it is eaten.

- Meals
 - A meal that would require a *Mezonos/ Hamotzee* and *Al Hamichya/ Birkas Hamazon* must be eaten in the sukkah⁵⁰.
 - A meal that would not require a *Mezonos/ Hamotzee* and *Al Hamichya/ Birkas Hamazon* should be eaten inside the sukkah but this is not obligatory⁵¹.
- Snacks
 - Snacks that are eaten on the fly do not need to be eaten in the sukkah⁵².
 - Snacks that are eaten in a settled fashion such as by sitting down at a table⁵³ follow the same rules as a meal⁵⁴.

"Leishev Basukkah"

Before eating in the sukkah, a unique blessing that concludes with the words "*leishev basukkah*" is recited⁵⁵. This blessing can be found in a siddur or bentcher (birchon).

- The blessing is only recited on a type of meal or snack that one is required to eat in the sukkah⁵⁶.
- A woman who follows Ashkenazic tradition may recite the blessing⁵⁷, but a man may not recite it for the exclusive benefit of a woman⁵⁸.
 - This is often relevant when a man has heard Kiddush but his wife has not. Although he may recite Kiddush for her, she must recite the *Leishev Basukkah* blessing on her own.
- The blessing is only recited if the equivalent of two fluid ounces⁵⁹ of *Mezonos/Hamotzee* food will be eaten⁶⁰. (As a point of reference, this is approximately a middle slice of 1lb. rye bread.)
 - On the first two nights of Sukkos, it may be recited even before eating just an ounce and a half⁶¹.
- This blessing is usually recited immediately after the *Mezonos/Hamotzee* blessing and before the food is eaten⁶².

- On Shabbos and Yom Tov, this blessing is usually recited at the conclusion of Kiddush⁶³.
 - When reciting it during Kiddush be aware that the place where it is inserted switches between the first and second day of Yom Tov⁶⁴. Any decent siddur or bentcher should have appropriate instructions.
 - If the daytime Kiddush is recited at the beginning of the meal, customs vary whether the blessing is mentioned after Kiddush or *Hamotzee*. If the Kiddush is recited before eating cake or cookies, the blessing is always inserted in Kiddush⁶⁵.
- If the blessing was forgotten, it may be recited as long as one is still in the sukkah. Ideally, more food should be eaten afterwards but if that is not an option, it is sufficient to continue to spend time in the sukkah⁶⁶.
- Leisure activities should be spent in the sukkah but the blessing is not recited for them. Nonetheless, it is appropriate to begin these activities by eating some food that requires the blessing. This way a blessing can refer to these activities as well⁶⁷. (This is particularly relevant for those who sleep in the sukkah.)

Living in the Sukkah

On Sukkos, the sukkah is to become our main residence with our house the temporary one⁶⁸. In addition to being our dining room, we should treat it as our living room and spend our leisure time there whenever practical⁶⁹.

- If possible, one should entertain company in the sukkah⁷⁰.
- Torah study should be in the sukkah unless it would compromise one's ability to focus⁷¹.
- Sleeping is supposed to be done in the sukkah⁷². In most communities, this is not the prevalent practice and various explanations are given for this⁷³.
- Unpleasant items or activity that we would not want in our living room/dining room should be kept out of the sukkah⁷⁴.
 - Pots and pans that were used to prepare food should not be brought into the sukkah just as they would not be brought into the dining room⁷⁵
 - Pots and pans that are designed for table presentation may be brought into the sukkah.
 - After the meal, used dishes and cups should be removed from the sukkah just as they would be removed from the dining room⁷⁶. It is also inappropriate to scrape dirty plates in the sukkah⁷⁷.

Rain

Just as we would find other accommodations were it to rain in our house, this would justify leaving the sukkah as well⁷⁸. (The obligation for the first two nights of Sukkos is different- see below.)

- The volume of rain to create an exemption is the amount that would spoil a delicate, cooked food⁷⁹. Another way to ascertain this is the volume of dripping that a leaky roof would force someone out of his house⁸⁰.
- In order to create an exemption it is not enough that it is raining hard outside. Rather, this volume must be dripping inside the sukkah.⁸¹
- When one is forced to leave because of the rain, it should be done reluctantly⁸².
- When there is an exemption from using the sukkah because of rain, no mitzvah is gained by eating there nonetheless⁸³.
- If a meal was moved indoors due to rain and the rain stops after the meal has begun, it is not obligatory to return to the sukkah⁸⁴. If the meal has not yet begun, then it must be eaten in the sukkah⁸⁵. (See below regarding a wet sukkah.)
- If rain stops after someone has already gone to sleep indoors, it is not necessary to relocate. If he did not yet go to sleep, there is a dispute whether he may still stay indoors for the night⁸⁶.
- After the rain stops, s'chach is often still dripping (if no shlok was in place). If this could create an exemption similar to rain, one should transfer to someone else's sukkah that is dry. If this is difficult, uncomfortable or unavailable it is permitted to eat indoors⁸⁷.

The First Two Nights

On the first two nights of Yom Tov, there is an obligation to eat a minimum amount of bread in the sukkah.⁸⁸

- This minimum amount is a volume equivalent to one and a half fluid ounces⁸⁹. (A middle slice of challah should be sufficient.)
- It must be eaten after fifty minutes past sunset⁹⁰.
- In a practical sense, this obligation remains even if it is raining. Below, are the specific procedures for such a circumstance⁹¹- they vary between the first and second night.

▲ First night⁹²

1. It is appropriate to wait an hour or two to see if the rain will subside. (If this is inconvenient, see below.)
2. If rain persists, Kiddush must be recited in the sukkah without the *Leisheiv Bassukah* blessing.
3. Wash for bread, recite *Ha'motzee* and eat the minimum volume of bread in the sukkah.
4. The rest of the meal may be eaten indoors.

▲ Second night⁹³

1. It is ideal to wait an hour or two to see if the rain will subside.
2. If rain persists or waiting is inconvenient, the entire meal is eaten indoors.
3. At the conclusion of the meal, the minimum volume of bread is eaten in the sukkah without the *Leisheiv Bassukah* blessing.

- If the initial waiting is difficult because people are hungry or tired, it is unnecessary⁹⁴.
- If on either night the rain stops before the men go to sleep, bread must be eaten again in the sukkah. This time, an equivalent of two fluid ounces (a larger, middle slice of challah) is required and it is recited with a *Leisheiv Bassukah* blessing⁹⁵.

Shmini Atzeres (the eighth day of the Sukkos holiday)

The obligation to eat in the sukkah extends through Shmini Atzeres, but the *Leisheiv Basukkah* blessing is not recited⁹⁶.

- Many Chasidim have a custom to have the daytime Kiddush in the sukkah with all other meals eaten indoors. Explanations are offered to reconcile this custom with the halacha.
- Some time during the afternoon of Shmini Atzeres we say an affectionate⁹⁷ "goodbye" to the sukkah⁹⁸. The text for this can be found in a siddur or a Sukkos machzor.

❖ Sukkah Exclusivity

- The sukkah and everything associated with it - s'chach, walls and decorations- are muktzah during Shabbos and Yom Tov (but not during weekday Chol Hamo'ed).⁹⁹
(See above **Assembling the Sukkah** for instructions of how to proceed if the sukkah falls apart during these days.)
 - This is true whether these items are still attached to the sukkah or not. For example, a decoration that is falling down or has fallen down on Shabbos or Yom Tov, may not be replaced.
 - A sukkah part that is moved as its regular function such as a door or shlok, may be used normally.

- A second restriction applies throughout the entire Sukkos holiday. The sukkah and everything associated with it - s'chach, walls and decorations- may not be used for a purpose other than their original mitzvah designation¹⁰⁰.
 - For example, even on Chol Hamoed it would be forbidden to use a decoration as a prop to hold up a book or to take a piece of s'chach in order to shoo away an insect.
 - The items may be used in a manner that does not change their primary function. For example, it is permitted to lean against a sukkah wall while it stands, since this does not negate the wall's function¹⁰¹.
 - The rule is true even if the items have fallen down by themselves¹⁰².
 - This prohibition remains until after Simchas Torah¹⁰³.
 - When it is not Shabbos or Yom Tov, these items may be moved, replaced or stored away since this is not a deviation from their original purpose¹⁰⁴.

¹ Tehillim 13:6
² Shulchan Aruch 630:1
³ Shulchan Aruch 630:10
⁴ Mishna Berura 630:48
⁵ See Mishna Berura 630:47, 49 and Chazon Ish Orach Chayim 77:6
⁶ Mishna Berura 630:4
⁷ Shulchan Aruch 629:15
⁸ Rema 629:12
⁹ Shulchan Aruch 629:14, Mishna Berura 629:39
¹⁰ Shulchan Aruch 629:14, Mishna Berura 629:39
¹¹ Mishna Berura 629:49
¹² Mishna Berura 631:5
¹³ See Mishna Berura 631:6
¹⁴ Shulchan Aruch 631:2-4
¹⁵ See Rema 630:5
¹⁶ Mishna Berura 630:28; Sha'ar Ha'tzeun 640:50
¹⁷ Bikurei Yaakov 635:2
¹⁸ Magen Avraham 14:3, see Mishna Berura 649:14
¹⁹ See hilchos chag b'chag 1:2
²⁰ Shulchan Aruch 635:1
²¹ Rema 635:1 see Mishna Berura ad loc. 10
²² Mishna Berura 629:22, 630:59
²³ See Shulchan Aruch 629:7
²⁴ Shulchan Aruch 632:1
²⁵ Rema 626:1
²⁶ See Shulchan Aruch 626:1
²⁷ Rema 637:2, Mishna Berura 637:10
²⁸ Mishna Berura 640:22, 24 Sha'ar Hatziyun ad loc. 30
²⁹ Mishna Berura 635:6, Sha'ar Hatziyun 634:6
³⁰ See Biur Halcha 637 "Im Gazal Eitzim"
³¹ Mishna Berura 626:21
³² Mishna Berura 626:21
³³ Mishna Berura 637:1
³⁴ Mishna Berura 637:1
³⁵ Mishna Berura 638:11
³⁶ Rema 627:4 according to Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt"l a tefach is "
³⁷ Mishna Berura 627:15
³⁸ Rema 626:3
³⁹ Mishna Berura 626:18
⁴⁰ Mateh Efrayim 625:29
⁴¹ Mateh Efrayim 625:29
⁴² Mishna Berura 626:21
⁴³ Vayikra 23:43
⁴⁴ Mishna Berura 625:1
⁴⁵ Shulchan Aruch 640:2
⁴⁶ Shulchan Aruch 640:2
⁴⁷ Shulchan Aruch 640:1
⁴⁸ See Shulchan Aruch 640:3-4
⁴⁹ Shulchan Aruch 639:2
⁵⁰ Shulchan Aruch 639:2
⁵¹ See Mishna Berura 639:13, 15
⁵² Shulchan Aruch 639: 2; See Biur Halacha 639 "Im"

⁵³ See Biur Halacha 639 "Im"
⁵⁴ Mishna Berura 639:16
⁵⁵ Shulchan Aruch and Rema 639:8; see Mishna Berura 639:16
⁵⁶ Mishna Berura 639:13, 16
⁵⁷ Mishna Berura 640:1
⁵⁸ Mishna Berura 640:1
⁵⁹ See Kol Dodi Laws of the Seder 2:6
⁶⁰ Mishna Berura 639:13,19
⁶¹ Mishna Berura 639:19
⁶² Shulchan Aruch 643:3
⁶³ Shulchan Aruch 643:1
⁶⁴ See Shulchan Aruch and Rema 661:1
⁶⁵ Mishna Berura 643:9
⁶⁶ Mishna Berura 639:48
⁶⁷ Mishna Berura 639:46
⁶⁸ Shulchan Aruch 639:1
⁶⁹ Shulchan Aruch 639:1
⁷⁰ Mishna Berura 639:2
⁷¹ Shulchan Aruch and Rema 639:4; Mishna Berura 639:29
⁷² Shulchan Aruch 639:2
⁷³ Rema 639:2, Mishna Berura 639:18
⁷⁴ Shulchan Aruch, Rema 639:1; Mishna Berura 639:5
⁷⁵ Mishna Berura 639:5
⁷⁶ Rema 639:1
⁷⁷ Mishna Berura 639:9
⁷⁸ Rema 639:4
⁷⁹ Shulchan Aruch 639:5, see Mishna Berura 639:34
⁸⁰ Rema 639:4
⁸¹ Mishna Berura 639:33
⁸² Rema 639:4
⁸³ Mishna Berura 639:45
⁸⁴ Shulchan Aruch 639:6
⁸⁵ Mishna Berura 639:38
⁸⁶ Mishna Berura 639:40
⁸⁷ Mishna Berura 640:23
⁸⁸ Shulchan Aruch 639:3
⁸⁹ Shulchan Aruch 639:3; see Kol Dodi Laws of the Seder 14:11
⁹⁰ Rema 639:3
⁹¹ Mishna Berura 639:35
⁹² See Rema 639:5 and Mishna Berura 639:35, 36
⁹³ Mishna Berura 639:36
⁹⁴ Sha'ar Hatziyun 639:67
⁹⁵ Mishna Berura 639:36; see Kol Dodi Laws of the Seder 2:6
⁹⁶ Shulchan Aruch 668:1
⁹⁷ See Kaf Hachayim 667:3; Mishna Berura 477:5
⁹⁸ Rema 667:1
⁹⁹ Rema 638:2
¹⁰⁰ Shulchan Aruch 638:1-2
¹⁰¹ Mishna Berura 638:4
¹⁰² Rema 638:1
¹⁰³ Shulchan Aruch 667:1
¹⁰⁴ Mishna Berura 638:14