

SUKKAH 101

A Basic Summary of Holiday Laws
In a Clear and Simple Style

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אשירה לד' כי גמל עלי

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 and sources are from the seforim:

שליט"א by Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Karp הלכות חג בחג
"הסוכה" by Rabbi Eliahu Weissfish

Please share your feedback with me at TimelyTorah@gmail.com.

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Tishrei 5774

❖ Permitted Sukkah Materials

Walls

- Sukkah walls may be created from any type of material¹ but they must stand stably².
 - The requirement is that they would not shake from normal gusts of wind. (Irrespective of whether any wind is actually blowing on them or not.)³
 - This concern is especially relevant when using walls made of fabric (such as canvas or sheets). One who has this type of sukkah should probably verify its status with a rabbi⁴.
- It is improper to use s'chach that has a foul smell.⁵ 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 not to be creative in this regard. The standard materials: evergreen branches, dried bamboo, thrushes or simple, unfinished narrow wooden slats should be used. If these are not available, consult a rabbi.

- Note that not all bamboo mats are valid for s'chach. Before purchasing one, clarify its status with a rabbi.
- Tree branches are a problem if its leaves will rapidly dry out and fall off and the necessary s'chach density will not remain through the entire holiday⁶. (The necessary s'chach density is defined below)
- S'chach is invalid if it sheds needles or leaves so incessantly that the sukkah becomes an unpleasant environment.⁷
- It is improper to use s'chach that has a foul smell⁸. This could be an issue if mold or mildew is present.
- Materials that are commonly used to construct a roof are not used for s'chach⁹. Therefore, although wooden beams may be used to support s'chach, using them as the actual s'chach should be avoided.
- S'chach cannot be used while it is bundled and bound together¹⁰.

S'chach Density

- S'chach must be dense enough that the average floor surface is shaded¹¹ without any individual pockets larger than 25 square inches which have a majority of sunlight.¹²
- Ideal s'chach density is a thickness through which stars can be seen or sunlight can stream¹³.
- S'chach that is so dense that it prevents rain from penetrating it is not ideal.¹⁴

❖ Assembling the Sukkah

Walls

Today, the custom is that the entire sukkah is enclosed (except for an optional doorway)¹⁵.

- 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 walls¹⁶.

S'chach

- The s'chach must be laid for the purpose of creating a sukkah, or at least with the intent to provide shade¹⁷.
 - When a worker lays down s'chach because he was hired to build a sukkah, it qualifies as a proper intent.

- 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.
- 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 assembled²⁰
 - 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.
- S'chach becomes disqualified if it is nailed to the sukkah.²¹
- Ideally, the s'chach should not be supported by items made of metal, plastic or fabric²². These types of materials should not secure the s'chach either²³.
 - Some ideal materials for s'chach to rest on are wooden beams or plywood.
 - When using a sukkah with a metal frame, a piece of plywood should ideally be attached on top of the frame in order that the s'chach rests on it instead of the metal.
- 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 overhangs or tree branches that extend above a sukkah could invalidate it²⁶. If you have this circumstance and the problem cannot be removed, consult a rabbi.
- 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.
- The sukkah should not be situated in an area where a foul odor is present²⁸.

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 holiday²⁹.
- The size of a sukkah must accommodate those who will be using it as well as the majority of the entire table that they will be using³⁰.
- Halacha considers items that are borrowed without permission as theft. Using any such item as part of a sukkah, could invalidate the sukkah³¹.
- A mezuzah is not placed on the entrance of the sukkah³². Of course, if the sukkah is built adjacent to a home, the mezuzah on the doorway of the house remains in place³³.
- The sukkah may not be assembled on Shabbos or Yom Tov³⁴. In fact, on those days everything associated with the sukkah is muktzah. See ❖ **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.³⁵ (Even though it is Shabbos or Yom Tov, this request may be made in a direct manner.)

Decorations

It is a mitzvah to beautify the sukkah³⁶.

- When hanging decorations from s'chach, the bottom of the decorations should not hang lower than 14.1 inches from the s'chach³⁷.
 - Lights that hang from the s'chach are not subject to this limitation³⁸.

Shlok

The optional cover that is built to spread over the s'chach for when it rains is referred to in Yiddish as a "shlok". While a shlok is spread out, the sukkah is not fit for use³⁹.

- S'chach cannot be laid down while the shlok is spread out⁴⁰.
- When Yom Tov begins, the shlok should not be covering the s'chach and throughout the holiday, the shlok should remain in the open position⁴¹ (unless it is raining).
- If the shlok partially covers some s'chach when it is in the open position, 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 basic concept⁴⁵. This is usually when they are five or six⁴⁶.
- Women are exempt from this mitzvah⁴⁷ but, of course, they may perform it if they wish.
- Someone who is unwell or experiencing strong discomfort due to conditions in the sukkah might be exempt from the obligation. A rabbi should be consulted⁴⁸.

Eating in the Sukkah

Throughout Sukkos it is praiseworthy to eat all foods exclusively in the sukkah⁴⁹. 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 in the sukkah but this is not obligatory.⁵¹
- Snacks
 - Snacks that are eaten "on-the-fly" do not need to be eaten in the sukkah⁵².
 - Snacks that are eaten in a settled fashion⁵³ such as by sitting down at a table follow the same rules as a meal⁵⁴.

“Leisheiv Basukkah”

Before eating in the sukkah, a unique blessing that concludes with the words “*leisheiv basukkah*” is recited⁵⁵. This blessing can be found in a siddur.

- This blessing is recited before eating bread.⁵⁶
- It is also recited before eating cookies, cakes or pastries but because this is debated, it is appropriate to eat these foods in a settled fashion in order to avoid any question.⁵⁷
- Regarding other types of *Mezonos/Al Hamichya* foods, (such as pasta,) it is only recited when eating them as a meal⁵⁸.
- Usually the equivalent of two fluid ounces⁵⁹ of *Mezonos/Hamotzee* food must be eaten to recite this blessing⁶⁰. (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.
- The blessing is recited immediately after the *Mezonos/Hamotzee* blessing and before the food is eaten⁶².
- On Shabbos and Yom Tov, this blessing is often recited at the conclusion of Kiddush⁶³.
 - During the daytime, if Kiddush is recited at the beginning of the meal, customs vary whether the blessing is mentioned after it or after the *Hamotzee*.
 - When Kiddush is recited before eating cake or cookies, the blessing is always inserted in Kiddush⁶⁴.
 - Be aware that the place where it is inserted in kiddush changes from the first day of Yom Tov to the second⁶⁵. (Most siddurim or bentchers have instructions for this.)
- A woman who follows Ashkenazic tradition may recite the blessing⁶⁶, but another person may not recite it exclusively for her.⁶⁷
 - This is often relevant when a man has heard Kiddush but his wife or daughter has not. Although he may recite Kiddush exclusively for her, she must recite the *Leisheiv Basukkah* blessing on her own.
- 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 merely continue spending time in the sukkah⁶⁸.
- Leisure activities should be spent in the sukkah but the blessing is not recited on 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 well⁶⁹. (This is particularly relevant for those who sleep in the sukkah.)
- If one made the blessing not realizing that the shlok (see ❖ **Assembling the Sukkah – Shlok** above,) was spread out the blessing should be repeated and another fluid ounce of *Mezonos* or *Hamotzee* should be eaten. Kiddush would not be repeated.⁷⁰

Living in the Sukkah

On Sukkos, in addition to the sukkah becoming a dining room, it is to be treated as a living room as well and leisure time should be spent there whenever practical⁷¹.

- Company should be entertained in the sukkah⁷².
- Torah study should be done in the sukkah unless the level of study would be compromised⁷³.

- Sleeping is supposed to be done in the sukkah⁷⁴ but in most communities, this is not the prevalent practice. Various explanations are given for this discrepancy⁷⁵.
- Unpleasant items or activity that one would not want in the living room/dining room should be kept out of the sukkah⁷⁶.
 - Pots and pans that would not be brought into the dining room should not be brought into the sukkah.⁷⁷ (If they 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 room⁷⁸. It is also inappropriate to scrape dirty plates in the sukkah⁷⁹.

Rain

Just as if rain is leaking in someone's house, he would find other accommodations, this would justify leaving the sukkah as well⁸⁰.

Therefore, the volume of dripping rain that a leaky roof would force one out of his house exempts eating in the sukkah.⁸¹ This is also measured as the volume of rain that would spoil a delicate, cooked food⁸². (See **The First Two Nights** below for a unique obligation that applies the first two nights of Sukkos.)

- This exemption is only when the above volume is dripping inside the sukkah - irrespective of how hard it is raining outside.⁸³
- If it is raining enough to create an exemption, there is no mitzvah and no reason to eat there⁸⁴.
- When one is forced to leave because of the rain, it should be done reluctantly⁸⁵.
- 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 sukkah⁸⁶. If the meal has not yet begun, it must be eaten in the sukkah⁸⁷.
 - After the rain stops, if a shlok was not in place, the s'chach is often still dripping. 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 the meal indoors.⁸⁸
- For those who sleep in the sukkah, if rain stops after one has already gone to sleep indoors, it is not necessary to relocate. If one set up the bed inside but didn't actually go to sleep, there is a dispute whether he may stay indoors for the night or not.⁸⁹

The First Two Nights (The evenings before September 19th and 20th 2013)

On each of the first two nights of Yom Tov, there is an obligation to eat the volume of one and a half fluid ounces⁹⁰ of bread in the sukkah.⁹¹

(For reference, a shot glass is often 1 fluid ounce. The bread's volume is determined as is without any squeezing or compacting⁹².)

- The bread must be eaten after nightfall. In North America this occurs no earlier than fifty minutes past sunset.⁹³
- This obligation remains even if it is raining⁹⁴ but it varies between the first and second night:
 - ▲ First Night⁹⁵
 1. It is proper to wait an hour or two to see if the rain will subside. (If this is difficult because people are hungry or tired, it is unnecessary⁹⁶.)

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 Night⁹⁷

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 on either night the rain stops before the men go to sleep, bread must be eaten in the sukkah once again. This time, an equivalent of two fluid ounces is required and it is recited with a *Leisheiv Bassukah* blessing⁹⁸.

Shmini Atzeres -The Eighth Day of the Sukkos Holiday (September 26, 2013)

The obligation to eat in the sukkah extends through Shmini Atzeres, but on Shmini Atzeres, the *Leisheiv Basukkah* blessing is not recited⁹⁹.

- 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 affectionate¹⁰⁰ "goodbye" to the sukkah¹⁰¹. 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.¹⁰²
 - 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.
 - On a weekday Chol Hamo'ed, there is no such thing as muktzah.
 - See ❖ **Assembling the Sukkah**, above, for instructions of how to proceed if the sukkah falls apart during these days.
- 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 designation¹⁰³.
 - For example, even on Chol Hamoed it would be forbidden to use a piece of s'chach as a prop to hold up a book or to take a decoration and use it as a fan.
 - The rule is true even if the items have fallen down by themselves¹⁰⁴.
 - Activities that do not change an item's designated function remain permitted. For example, it is permitted to lean against a standing sukkah wall since this does not negate the wall's function¹⁰⁵.
 - This prohibition remains until after Simchas Torah¹⁰⁶.

- 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 purpose¹⁰⁷.

¹ Shulchan Aruch 630:1
² Shulchan Aruch 630:10
³ Mishna Berura 630:48
⁴ See Mishna Berura 630:47, 49 and Chazon Ish Orach Chayim 77:6
⁵ Mishna Berura 630:4
⁶ Rema 629:12
⁷ Shulchan Aruch 629:14, Mishna Berura 629:39
⁸ Shulchan Aruch 629:14, Mishna Berura 629:39
⁹ Mishna Berura 629:49
¹⁰ Shulchan Aruch 629:15
¹¹ Shulchan Aruch 631:2
¹² Rema 631:2
¹³ Mishna Berura 631:5
¹⁴ See Mishna Berura 631:6
¹⁵ Mishna Berura 630:28; Sha'ar Ha'tzeun 640:50
¹⁶ Bikurei Yaakov 635:2
¹⁷ Shulchan Aruch 635:1, Mishna Berura 635:1
¹⁸ Magen Avraham 14:3, see Mishna Berurah 649:14
¹⁹ See hilchos chag b'chag 1:2
²⁰ Rema 635:1 see Mishna Berura ad loc. 10
²¹ Sha'ar Hatziyun 633:6
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
²⁷ Rema 637:2, Mishna Berura 637:10
²⁸ Mishna Berura 630:1
²⁹ Mishna Berura 640:22, 24 Sha'ar Hatziyun ad loc. 30
³⁰ Mishna Berura 635:6, Sha'ar Hatziyun 634:6
³¹ See Biur Halcha 637 "Im Gazal Eitzim"
³² Mishna Berura 626:21
³³ Mishna Berura 626:21
³⁴ Mishna Berura 637:1
³⁵ Mishna Berura 637:1
³⁶ Mishna Berura 638:11
³⁷ Rema 627:4 see Igros Moshe Orach Chayim I #136
³⁸ Mishna Berura 627:15
³⁹ Rema 626:3
⁴⁰ Mishna Berura 626:18
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 639:22
⁵⁷ Mishna Berura 639:16
⁵⁸ Mishna Berura 639:15
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 Mishna Berura 643:9
⁶⁵ See Shulchan Aruch and Rema 661:1
⁶⁶ Mishna Berura 640:1
⁶⁷ Mishna Berura 640:1
⁶⁸ Mishna Berura 639:48
⁶⁹ Mishna Berura 639:46
⁷⁰ Mishna Berura 639:48
⁷¹ Shulchan Aruch 639:1
⁷² Mishna Berura 639:2
⁷³ Shulchan Aruch and Rema 639:4; Mishna Berura 639:29
⁷⁴ Shulchan Aruch 639:2
⁷⁵ Rema 639:2, Mishna Berura 639:18
⁷⁶ Shulchan Aruch, Rema 639:1; Mishna Berura 639:5
⁷⁷ Mishna Berura 639:5
⁷⁸ Rema 639:1
⁷⁹ Mishna Berura 639:9
⁸⁰ Rema 639:4
⁸¹ Rema 639:4
⁸² Shulchan Aruch 639:5, see Mishna Berura 639:34
⁸³ Mishna Berura 639:33
⁸⁴ Mishna Berura 639:45
⁸⁵ Rema 639:4
⁸⁶ Shulchan Aruch 639:6
⁸⁷ Mishna Berura 639:38
⁸⁸ Mishna Berura 640:23
⁸⁹ Mishna Berura 639:40
⁹⁰ Shulchan Aruch 639:3; see Kol Dodi Laws of the Seder 14:11
⁹¹ Shulchan Aruch 639:3
⁹² Sha'ar Hatziyun 486:7, see also V'zos Habracha Chapter 25 note 7
⁹³ Rema 639:3
⁹⁴ Rema 639:5
⁹⁵ See Rema 639:5 and Mishna Berura 639:35, 36
⁹⁶ Sha'ar Hatziyun 639:67
⁹⁷ Mishna Berura 639:36
⁹⁸ Mishna Berura 639:36; see Kol Dodi Laws of the Seder 2:6
⁹⁹ Shulchan Aruch 668:1
¹⁰⁰ See Kaf Hachayim 667:3; Mishna Berurah 477:5
¹⁰¹ Rema 667:1
¹⁰² Rema 638:2
¹⁰³ Shulchan Aruch 638:1-2
¹⁰⁴ Rema 638:1
¹⁰⁵ Mishna Berura 638:4
¹⁰⁶ Shulchan Aruch 667:1
¹⁰⁷ Mishna Berura 638:14