

Introduction to Masechet Sukka



Compiled by

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In loving memory of my father

ר' יוסף בן מנחם מענדל ופעשי ע"ה

*who exemplified the themes of Sukkot and taught us to open our homes and
hearts to all*

Introduction to Masechet Sukka

The holiday of *Sukkot* is replete with a wide variety of *mitzvot*. Some are stated explicitly in the Torah, while others are considered *halacha leMoshe miSinai*. Rav Steinzaltz zt"l explains that there are several themes associated with the holiday, and the *halachot* reflect this multifaceted nature. There are the general *mitzvot* of a *chag* (which we will learn in *Beitza*), and the *mitzvot* of the *Shalosh Regalim* (which we will learn in *Chagiga*). In addition, on *Sukkot* we have the *mitzva* of *sukka*, the *arba minim* (four species), multiple *korbanot* that are exclusive to this *chag*, and special ceremonies performed in the *Mikdash*.



Sukkot does not commemorate a specific historical event. It does not relate to a stage of the agricultural year. But it is the conclusion of all the *chagim* of the year. It closes the calendar year, and it encapsulates our history. While remembering the past, we also look to the future and pray for success. All this is captured in our observance of the *chag*. The *sukka* represents the 40 years of nomadic existence, without stability or a country, but with the protection of the *ananei hakavod* (clouds of glory). And then we arrived in *Eretz Yisrael*, whose bounty we celebrate with the *arba minim* (four species) and pray for rain and successful harvests in the year ahead.

Sukkot is also unique in that it has a universal, rather than national, character. The thanks for material security and success, and the prayers for life-giving rain, are not reserved for the benefit of the Jewish people. The Rabbis associate the seventy bulls offered as *korbanot* during the holiday with the paradigmatic seventy nations of the world (*Sukkah* 55b):

אמר רבי (אלעזר) הני שבעים פרים כנגד מי כנגד שבעים אומות פר יחידי למה כנגד אומה יחידה משל למלך בשר ודם שאמר לעבדיו עשו לי סעודה גדולה ליום אחרון אמר לאוהבו עשה לי סעודה קטנה כדי שאהנה ממך אמר רבי יוחנן אוי להם לגויים שאבדו ואין יודעין מה שאבדו בזמן שביית המקדש קיים מזבח מכפר עליהן ועכשיו מי מכפר עליהן :

Rabbi Elazar said: These seventy bulls - to what do they correspond? They correspond to the seventy. Why a single bull (brought on Shemini Atzeret)? It corresponds to the singular nation (Israel). A parable about a king of flesh and blood who said to his servants: Prepare me a great feast. On the last day, he said to his beloved servant: Prepare me a small feast so that I can derive pleasure from you alone. Rabbi Yohanan said: Woe unto the nations that lost something and do not know what they lost. When the Temple is standing, the altar atones for them. And now, who atones for them?

In a Messianic vision, Zecharyah (14:16) tells us:

וְהָיָה כָּל־הַנּוֹתֵר מִכָּל־הַגּוֹיִם הַבָּאִים עַל־יְרוּשָׁלַם וְעָלוּ מִדֵּי שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה לַהֲשִׁתַּחֲוֹת לַמֶּלֶךְ ה' צָבָאוֹת וְלַחֹג אֶת־חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת :

All who survive of all those nations that came up against Jerusalem shall make a pilgrimage year by year to bow low to the King LORD of Hosts and to observe the Feast of Booths.

Sukkot will be celebrated by all because it represents all people.

Another distinctive feature of Sukkot is the emphasis on *simcha* (joy). In addition to the "general" *simcha* of every holiday, Sukkot brings with it a special *mitzva* of *simcha*, to the point that in the *tefillot*, we describe the day as *zman simchateinu* (the time of our rejoicing).

We also pray for rain and blessing in the upcoming year. In the *Mikdash*, the *simchat beit hashoeva* (the water libation ceremony), the surrounding of the



mizbeach with willow branches, and the waving of the willows on the last day all represented this aspect. The *arba minim* are all species which require ample rain to grow, as well.

It's interesting to note two major themes which run through the *masechet*. Many of the discussions revolve around the transmission of

halacha leMoshe miSinai and other traditions, especially with reference to the definition of terminology used. What exactly is a *sukka*? What are its dimensions? What materials can be used? And what about the *arba minim*? What is the precise definition of the species prescribed in *Vayikra* 23:41?

וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים וְעֵנָף עֵץ־עֵבֶת וְעַרְבֵי־נָחַל וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים:

On the first day you shall take the product of *hadar* trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.

Since these are not specified in the Torah, we must rely on transmission from previous generations. This is further complicated by the *Mikdash* ceremonies which are not explicit in the Torah. And this also explains why when these ceremonies were opposed by various sects, the Rabbis felt compelled to magnify their performance.

The second theme is the difference between what happens in the *Mikdash* and outside it (referred to as the "*medinah*"). Some of the holiday's observances are totally independent of the existence of the *Mikdash*, such as *sukka*. Others are in effect exclusively in the *Mikdash*, such as the *korbanot*. And then there are the *mitzvot* whose observance is different in the *Mikdash* and outside it. When the *Mikdash* is destroyed, the Rabbis introduced changes in the performance of these *mitzvot*.

For more information about the celebration and observance of *Sukkot* in the *Mikdash*: [Sukkot - Temple Institute](#)

A note about *Shemini Atzeret*:

Halachikally, this *chag* is separate and distinct from *Sukkot*. However, since it follows immediately after *Sukkot* and is also called *zman simchateinu* (the season of our rejoicing), aspects of its observance are discussed in this *masechet* as well.

The structure of the *Masechet*:

Chapter (pages)	Known as	Content
Pereq 1 (2a-20b)	סוכה	The structure and dimensions of the <i>sukka</i>
Pereq 2 (20b-29b)	היִשּׁוֹן תַּחַת הַמִּטָּה	Dwelling in the <i>sukka</i>
Pereq 3 (29b -42b)	לולב הגזול	The <i>arba minim</i>
Pereq 4 (42b-50a)	לולב וערבה	Relationship between <i>mitzvot</i> of <i>Sukkot</i> performed in the <i>Mikdash</i> and outside it; the <i>halachot leMoshe miSinai</i> of the holiday
Pereq 5 (50a-56b)	הַחֲלִיל	The celebration in the <i>Mikdash</i> ; the <i>mitzva</i> of rejoicing; the special <i>korbanot</i>

The *mitzva* to dwell in a *sukka*

Vayiqra 23:42-43

בַּסֻּכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל־
הָאִזְרָח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשְׁבוּ בַסֻּכּוֹת:
לְמַעַן יָדְעוּ דִרְתִּיכֶם כִּי בַסֻּכּוֹת
הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי
אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי ה'
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

You shall live in booths seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in booths, in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I the LORD your God.

The parameters: Seizing upon the word **תֵּשְׁבוּ** (you shall dwell), the Gemara mandates **תֵּשְׁבוּ כַעֲיֵן תְּדוּרוֹ** (dwell – in the *sukka* - as you would reside – in your house). According to the *braita* on 28b, any activity you would normally perform in your home (such as eating and sleeping) must be done in the *sukka* during this week. If one does not do so (by eating or sleeping outside the *sukka*, the act is a **בִּטּוּל עֲשֵׂה** – failure to observe a positive *mitzva*. Of course, the acts of “eating” and “sleeping” will need to be defined in the Gemara.



The exemptions: Residing in the *sukka* is a **מצות עשה שהזמן גרמא** – a positive time-bound obligation. As such, women are exempt.¹ If a person is ill or suffers severe discomfort, he is also exempt (26a and 28a). A child “who no longer needs his mother” is obligated in *sukka*. Interestingly, Shammai insisted on his newborn grandson living in a *sukka*, by removing the plaster roof over the crib and placing wooden beams instead.

The roof סכך: The Torah does not define how the *sukka* is to be built; the details are therefore derived from *pesukim* or taught as *Halacha leMoshe miSinai*.

Definition: A roof which provides shade and is built for that purpose. The shade provided must be greater than the light which comes through the

¹ This will lead to an extended discussion of this concept.

gaps; this means that the solid part of the *s'chach* must have a greater total area than the open areas.

Materials: The materials used must:

- grow from the ground
- be severed from the ground, and
- not be susceptible to *tuma*.

Size: The area covered must be at least seven by seven *tefachim* (21-28 inches in each dimension). A gap of less than 3 *tefachim* (9-12 inches), or invalid materials of that size, in one direction can combine with the valid part of the *s'chach*, and the *sukka* is fit for use. However, if the invalid section is at least 3 *tefachim* in both directions, the roof is unacceptable, because the size of the *s'chach* is now less than the minimum requirement.

If there is an empty gap (3 *tefachim* wide) or a strip of unacceptable material (4 *tefachim* wide) running across the *sukka*, the *sukka* is viewed as being divided into two separate *sukkot*. Each “sub-*sukka*” must meet the minimal requirements – size and number of walls - on its own.

דופן עקומה (a bent wall): The *s'chach* must abut the wall of the *sukka*. If it does not, or there is intervening invalid material, the *sukka* is invalid, unless there are enough other walls.² However, there is a leniency if the interposition of invalid material is less than 4 *amot* (6-8 feet), which considers that space as part of the adjacent wall. The wall is regarded as bending inwards, and “eliminates” the separation.

The walls: There must be at least three walls³. Two of these walls must be at least 7 *tefachim* wide; the third is valid if it is at least one *tefach* (4-6 inches) wide. The height of the walls must be between 10 *tefachim* (40-60 inches) and 20 *amot* (30-40 feet). We learned some of the concepts involved in the walls of the *sukka* when we learned *Eiruv*.

לבד (Lavud; literally, “closed”): When 2 surfaces are less than 3 *tefachim* (12-18 inches) apart, they are regarded as connected. Therefore, gaps of less than 3 *tefachim* are usually not an issue.

גוד (Gud; Literally, “extend”): Although the walls must touch the ground and the *s'chach*, the concept of *gud* sees walls that are ten *tefachim* (40-

² See next section

³ The derivation of this is discussed on 6b.

60 inches) high as extending to areas they don't actually reach. This can be:

- גוד אסיק מחיצתא: Extended upward (towards the *s'chach*)
- גוד אחית מחיצתא: Extended downward (towards the ground)

If the lower edge of the wall is more than three *tefachim* (12-18 inches) above the ground, this concept cannot be applied, since small animals could pass through. However, when the related principle of **פי תקרה יורד** (the edge of the roof extends downward and seals off) is applied, allowing the edge of the roof to form a wall, the three-*tefach* limit is not considered.



The *arba minim*

The *mitzva* of “taking” the *arba minim* is found in *Vayiqra* 23:40

וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרֵי עֵץ הָדָר כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים וְעֵנָף עֲצֵי-עֵבֶת וְעַרְבֵי-נָחַל וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים:	On the first day you shall take the product of <i>hadar</i> trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.
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The *halacha* (35a) defines these species as:

- פְּרֵי עֵץ הָדָר: The *etrog* (citron)
- כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים: The *lulav* (palm frond)
- עֵנָף עֲצֵי-עֵבֶת: The *hadas* (myrtle)
- עַרְבֵי-נָחַל: The *arava* (willow)

All four species combine to form a collective *mitzva*.

Note that the verse states *on the first day*, yet we are accustomed to “take” the *arba minim* on every day of the holiday except Shabbat. In the *Mikdash*, the *arba minim* were “taken” every day of the full week of *Sukkot*, since the *pasuq* states “you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.” Outside the *Mikdash*, they were “taken” only on the first day. This means that the Torah requirement for “taking” the *arba minim* is on the first day only, if not in the *Mikdash*. After the destruction, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai ordained that the *arba minim* be “taken” all week, in commemoration of the *Mikdash*.



The conditions: Of course, since there are multiple species involved, there will be specific conditions for validity and invalidity for each of the species, such as size and color. There are also *general* conditions for validity, which are derived from the *pasuq* above:

- **וּלְקַחְתֶּם** (and you shall take): On 34b, we will learn that this is read as **וּלְקַחַת תֵּם** (you shall take completely), meaning that you need all four, and that no single species can be damaged.
- **לָכֶם** (for you): You must legally own the *arba minim* you “take.” Therefore, borrowed or stolen ones are invalid.
- **הָדָר** (beautiful): On page 31a, this description of the *etrog* is extended to all the species. This is the only case where a lack of beauty invalidates a *mitzva* (as opposed to “merely” being a less-than-optimal way of *mitzva* observance).

Nazir 2b:

כְּדֵתִינָא זֶה אֱלִי וְאֶנְהוּ אֶנְאָה לְפָנָיו בְּמִצְוֹת אֶעֱשֶׂה לְפָנָיו סוּכָה נָאָה לוּלָב נָאָה צִיִּצִית נָאָה
אֶכְתוֹב לְפָנָיו סֵפֶר תּוֹרָה נָאָה וְאֶכְרֹכֶנּוּ בְּשִׁירָאִין נָאִים

As it is taught in a baraita: “This is my God and I will glorify Him [*anvehu*]” (Exodus 15:2). I will be beautiful before Him in mitzvot. How is this done? I will make before Him a beautiful *sukka*, a beautiful *lulav*, beautiful ritual fringes. I will write before Him a beautiful Torah scroll, and I will wrap it in beautiful silk cloths [*shira'in*].

Since the *mitzva* of “taking” the *arba minim* is Rabbinic after the first day, some of these conditions are relaxed for the last six days. The requirements of ownership and a complete set apply only on the first day (29b, 36b). The requirement of beauty is the subject of a dispute between Rashi and Tosafot, who hold that it pertains for the entire week, and Rambam, who states that it applies only to the first day.

Some food for thought:

The Midrash in Vayiqra Rabba (30) states:

דָּבָר אֲחֵר, פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר, אֱלוֹי יִשְׂרָאֵל, מֶה אֶתְרוֹג זֶה יֵשׁ בּוֹ טַעַם וְיֵשׁ בּוֹ רִיחַ, כִּדּוּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ בָּהֶם
בְּנֵי אָדָם שֵׁישׁ בָּהֶם תּוֹרָה וְיֵשׁ בָּהֶם מַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים. כִּפְתַּת תְּמָרִים, אֱלוֹי יִשְׂרָאֵל, מֶה הִתְמַרָה הַזֶּה
יֵשׁ בּוֹ טַעַם וְאֵין בּוֹ רִיחַ, כִּדּוּשׁ הֵם יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ בָּהֶם שֵׁישׁ בָּהֶם תּוֹרָה וְאֵין בָּהֶם מַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים. וְעֵנָף
עֵץ עֵבֶת, אֱלוֹי יִשְׂרָאֵל, מֶה הִדָּס יֵשׁ בּוֹ רִיחַ וְאֵין בּוֹ טַעַם, כִּדּוּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ בָּהֶם שֵׁישׁ בָּהֶם מַעֲשִׂים
טוֹבִים וְאֵין בָּהֶם תּוֹרָה. וְעֶרְבֵי נָחַל, אֱלוֹי יִשְׂרָאֵל, מֶה עֲרֵבָה זֶה אֵין בָּהֶם טַעַם וְאֵין בָּהֶם רִיחַ, כִּדּוּשׁ הֵם
יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ בָּהֶם בְּנֵי אָדָם שֵׁישׁ בָּהֶם לֹא תּוֹרָה וְלֹא מַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים, וּמֶה הִקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עוֹשֶׂה
לָהֶם, לְאַבְדָּן אִי אֶפְשָׁר, אֲלֵא אָמַר הִקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יִקְשְׁרוּ כָלֶם אֶגְדָּה אַחַת וְהוּן מִכְפָּרִין אֱלוֹי עַל
אֱלוֹי, וְאֵם עֲשִׂיתֶם כִּדּוּשׁ אוֹתָהּ שְׁעָה אֲנִי מִתְעַלֶּה, הִדָּא הוּא דְכָתִיב (עֲמוֹס ט, ו): (הַבּוֹנֶה בְּשָׁמַיִם
מַעֲלוֹתָיו, וְאֵימָתִי הוּא מִתְעַלֶּה כְּשֶׁהוּן עֲשׂוּיִין אֶגְדָּה אַחַת, שְׁנֵאמַר (עֲמוֹס ט, ו): (וְאֶגְדָּתוֹ עַל אֶרֶץ
יִסְדָּהּ, לִפְנֵיכֶם מִשָּׁה מִזְהִיר לְיִשְׂרָאֵל:

Another explanation: "The fruit of a beautiful tree" - these are [referring to] Israel. Just like this citron (etrog), which has taste and has smell, so too Israel has among them people that have Torah and have good deeds. "The branches of a date palm" - these are [referring to] Israel. Just like this date, which has taste and has no smell, so too Israel has among them those that have Torah but do not have good deeds. "And a branch of a braided tree (a myrtle)" - these are [referring to] Israel. Just like this myrtle, which has smell and has no taste, so too Israel has among them those that have good deeds but do not have Torah. "And brook willows" - these are [referring to] Israel. Just like this willow, which has no smell and has no taste, so too Israel has among them people that have no Torah and have no good deeds. And what does the Holy One, blessed be He, do to them? To destroy them is impossible, but rather the Holy One, blessed be He, said "bind them all together [into] one grouping and these will atone for those." And if you will have done that, I will be elevated at that time. This is [the meaning of] what is written (Amos 9:6), "He Who built the upper chambers in the heavens" (indicating his elevation). And when is He elevated? When they make one grouping, as it is stated (Ibid.), "and established His grouping on the earth."

The willow (arava) is also used for the culminating ritual on Hoshana Rabba, the last day of the chag. This is in remembrance of the observance in the Mikdash when very large willow branches were cut and placed at each side of the mizbeach (altar), which was then circled seven times by the people. In fact, according to the Rambam,⁴ non-Kohanim were permitted to walk between the mizbeach and the heichal (sanctuary), where they were normally not permitted, for this ritual.

Rav Soloveitchik asks why the arava, the symbol of a Jew who lacks substantive Torah and mitzvot, is accorded this honor. He suggests that such a Jew can

⁴ Lulav 7:23

have other, in his words, “majestic attributes.” This person may be someone who was *moser nefesh* (sacrificed all) for the sake of Heaven. The willow leaning on the *mizbeach* represents a person who surrenders something of great value – even his or her very life – for the sake of a noble cause. While many of us would like to be “*etrog* Jews,” let us also aspire to be “*aravot*,” leaning in with all our strengths, talents and abilities, to shelter that which is precious, as the Gemara describes on page 45a: וְרֹאשֵׁיהֶן כְּפוּפִין עַל גְּבִי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ - and the tops (of the branches) would be inclined over the top of the altar.



Naama Henkin hy"d, who was killed with her husband Eitam hy"d in a terrorist attack on Sukkot 2015, was a talented graphic designer. This is her work:



The image can be downloaded by clicking [here](#).