

Overview of Rules of Sukkah

By: Rabbi Noah Gradofsky

Note: These rules are ordered based on Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, Laws of Sukkah, Chapter 6. Most of these matters are not points of controversy.

1. Women and children are exempt from Sukkah. A child who doesn't need his mother (~5 years old) should dwell in the sukkah for purposes of educating him.
2. A sick person and their aid need not dwell in the sukkah. This sickness need not be life threatening. Similarly, anyone who would suffer from being in the sukkah is exempt (but their aid is not). This suffering can be due to personal reasons or wind, bees etc.
3. A mourner must dwell in the sukkah, but a groom (for 7 days) and those who celebrate with him need not.
4. One on a trip to do a mitzvah (*shaliach mitzvah*) is exempt. A traveler is exempt during the time they are traveling (e.g. if they travel by day, they need a sukkah at night).
5. One should eat, sleep, and live in the sukkah in much the same way they live in their house all year. But see point 2 above (which may explain why most in our day tend not to sleep in the sukkah).
6. We eat, drink, and sleep in the sukkah. It is forbidden to eat a meal outside the sukkah. Snacks such as a small volume of food (< an eggs volume) or fruits or water may be eaten outside the sukkah, though one is permitted (and praised) if one decides not to do so.
7. One is only required to eat in the sukkah on the first night, and then only an olives volume of food. Thereafter, one may decide not to eat meals and therefore not have to eat in the sukkah. The Ashkenazi voice in the Shulchan Aruch, Rabbi Moshe Isserless (Orach Chayim 639:3) rules that one should be sure to eat on the first night after 3 stars come out, so that it is certainly the night. This makes sense. **Note:** According to some, including R. Isserless in Orach Chayim 639:5 the rule that one is obliged to eat in the sukkah on the first night overrides rule #10 below, so that if it is raining on the first night, one should at least eat an olives size of bread in the sukkah. Though his position is not without merit, I would follow those (e.g. Rashb"a) who disagree (see *Bet Yosef Orach Chayim 639 s.v. "ayn ketsava"* and following). If one decides to eat in the sukkah in the rain, whether on the first night or otherwise, one should not make the blessing *leshev basukkah*.
8. The person's head and the majority of the person's body, along with the table must be in the sukkah.
9. During Sukkot one may read Torah in the sukkah, but should exit the sukkah as s/he attempts to understand things well, as the sukkah may be a distraction. One may pray in the sukkah.
10. If there is enough rain to ruin the food being/to be eaten, one may go inside. Once one has started eating inside, one need not go back out to the sukkah if it stops raining. Similarly, one who sleeps in the sukkah and leaves because of the rain, needs not go back when it stops raining.
11. On the 7th day at Mincha time (for us the 8th), one can start removing things from the sukkah (e.g. utensils).
12. Each time one enters the sukkah, they should say the blessing "*leshev bassukkah*" before sitting. The first time one sits in the Sukkah, one also says *shehecheyanu*. According to Maimonides, this means one should enter the sukkah, say kiddush standing, say *leshev basukah*, sit, and then say *shehecheyanu*. This is the case even if one normally makes kiddush while sitting. Others say this is too literal a read of the blessing "*leshev*" (= to sit), and say you can bless any time before you eat. I agree with the others.
13. One should sit in the sukkah on Shemini Atseret without saying a blessing. This includes sleeping in the sukkah (though some e.g. Mordechai disagree). For the halachic sources regarding this rule, see "Living in the Sukkah on Shemini Atseret" available in the beth midrash or on the Rabbi section of Temple Israel's website: <http://www.templeisraeloflb.org/Rabbi.html>.
14. If one didn't make a sukkah before sukkot, one should build on on *chol hamoed* (intermediate days). One may not use the walls or schach of the sukkah for any other purpose during the holiday (through *Shemini Atseret*).
15. Rule 14 applies to any food hung as decorations, except if they were hung on condition that you could eat them.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Although this is a matter of some controversy, I strongly feel that **WEARING TEFILLIN ON CHOL HAMO'ED IS A MITZVAH**. For the halachic sources regarding this rule, see "Does One Wear Tefillin On Chol Hamoed?" available in the beth midrash or on the Rabbi section of Temple Israel's website: <http://www.templeisraeloflb.org/Rabbi.html>.