

## Building a “Kosher-for-Covid” Sukkah

As we begin to think about the fall chagim, some may be worried that even if the weather is nice during Sukkot, it will not be possible to invite guests to sit in a sukkah because we don't want to have too many people gathered together in close quarters. Isn't the confined space of a small hut dangerous during this time of pandemic? However, the halakhot (laws) of Sukkot make it possible to build a sukkah while simultaneously creating a relatively open, breezy space in which to celebrate the holiday. While it is still important to maintain physical distance, as long as those in a sukkah are not seated too closely to one another, we needn't worry about being confined to an enclosed and therefore dangerous space.

### **The Walls:**

A sukkah must have a minimum of two full walls plus part of a third wall (the partial wall only needs to be a minimum of a tefakh, about 3.2 inches wide!). While in an ideal world it is preferable that the sukkah have four complete walls, it is permissible according to Jewish law to have an “open” sukkah, with two walls and a small third one (and this certainly is the case in a time of pandemic, to allow for maximum air flow). No need to worry about confinement with only two walls and small third one! In addition, the walls can be made of almost any material and need not even cohere as unified “walls” – the sides of the sukkah can be made of sticks or posts that are spaced out (creating a sense of openness and allowing air to move). Be careful, though...the gaps in the walls can't be separated by more than three tefachim (about 9 1/2 inches). You might also consider building walls out of permeable, airy canvas or other types of cloth – here the only issue is not allowing the sides to blow too much in the wind (this can be prevented by using ropes or cords to secure the canvases in case it's windy). Also, a reminder that the walls must be at least 32 inches high, and just in case you are really ambitious...the entire structure may not be taller than 30 feet!

### **The Roof Covering:**

There's a great deal of flexibility in Jewish law regarding the walls because the “heart and soul” of the sukkah is in fact its roof. The sukkah needs to be covered with s'khkch—raw, unfinished “vegetable matter.” Common sukkah roof-coverings include bamboo poles, evergreen branches, reeds, corn stalks, narrow strips (1×1 or 1×2) of unfinished lumber, or special s'khakh mats. The s'khakh must be detached from its source of growth—thus a live trellis, or branches still attached to a tree, cannot be used. Remember that there must be sufficient s'khakh to provide enough shade so that in a bright midday there is more shade than sun seen on the floor of the sukkah. The s'khakh has to be spread out evenly over the entire sukkah, so that there should not be any gap larger than 9 1/2 inches.

In sum, it's absolutely possible to build a “kosher for Covid” sukkah – this hut is meant to be temporary and intended to connect us to the natural world rather than cut us off from it. The point is precisely to deny ourselves, during the week of Sukkot, the stability and safety of a house, and to experience the vulnerability and transience of nature. This, in turn, reminds us of the illusory character of material concerns, and our ultimate connection to, and dependence upon, the Source of Being.

-Rabbi Rubin