The Chicago Center
Digest
Mishna Berura
THE DAILY RESOURCE FOR MISHNA BERURA YOMI
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סימן תרכ״ט סעיף ד׳-ו׳

Halacha Highlight

Using mats as *schach*

Shulchan Aruch Siman 629 Seif 6
במחצלת של קנים וכו׳
Concerning a mat of reeds etc.

Shulchan Aruch (סע׳ ו׳) elaborates on the topic of the use of a mat made of natural materials for *schach*. Sefer HaSukkah HaShalem (פ״ח סע׳ ל׳-ל״ד) summarizes the *halachos* as follows. There are mats that are Biblically disqualified for use for *schach*, there are mats that are Rabbinically disqualified for use for *schach* and there are mats that may be used even *l'chatchila*. A mat that was made for sleeping or sitting and is susceptible to the *tumah* of a *zav* is Biblically unfit for *schach*. Additionally, if the mat has a rim that allows for the storage of items in the mat it is susceptible to *tumah* as a utensil and is Biblically unfit for *schach*. If a mat was not made for sleeping and does not have a rim it is Rabbinically unfit for use as *schach* if most people in that city use that kind of mat for sleeping or for use as a roof on a structure. In the event that there is no specific use for the mat in the city but the mat is the approximate size of a regular sized person, it is assumed that the mat is used for sleeping and is Rabbinically disqualified for use as *schach*.

Therefore, in order for a mat to be fit for use as *schach* the mat may not have a rim, it may not be designated for sleeping and it may not be used as a roof to a structure. In the event that the mat was made to be used as *schach* it may be used for *schach* even if the custom in town is not clearly established. Poskim write that nowadays many of the mats that are manufactured are not used for sleeping, accordingly, if they were made to be used as *schach* they are valid. One should be mindful, however, that the material that is used to bind the bamboo or reed is natural rather than something that does not grow from the ground or is susceptible to *tumah* (פסקי תשובות אות ו׳).

Stories to Share

A Matter of Taste

מ״ב ס׳ תרכ״ט, ס״ק י״ב: ״ומחזי כאילו אינו גידולי קרקע...״

People like to spruce up their sukkah in a variety of ways. Some add pictures or hang decorations. Others paint their sukkah to make it more attractive. A certain family painted their sukkah a nice shade of green. They wanted to paint the s'chach too, to make it look even nicer.

But someone commented that it was likely forbidden from the halachah on today's amud. "Why is this different than using a bundle of flax as sechach? One reason this is forbidden is because making flax into a bundle changes it from its natural state. Do you think painting could be better?"

But when the Mechezeh Avraham was consulted regarding such a question he permitted such adornment. "How is painting the s'chach a change of its tzurah, its natural form? When painted it remains in its natural form. It is merely a different color!"

שו״ת מחזה אברהם, ח״א, ס׳ קל״ד

When Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zt"l, was consulted about this he also permitted. "The halachah is that one may paint his s'chach."

But when Rav Elyashiv was asked about coating the s'chach with formica he forbade this out of hand. "Coating the sechach with formica is definitely forbidden. This changes the wood from its original state and is no different from a bundle of flax. Just like the latter is forbidden because it is changed the same is true with coating the s'chach."

שו״ת אבני ישפה, ח״, ס׳ ס״ד, ד׳

Overview

Siman 629 Seif 4:

If one used flax that was not pounded or combed for *schach* it is valid since it is just wood. If it was pounded and combed it is invalid.

- There are *Poskim* who are lenient even if the flax was pounded and not combed but one should not even be lenient to use flax that was only soaked unless it is a pressing circumstance. (M.B. 11)
- Cotton and cannabis should not be used for *schach* if they were pounded and combed. (M.B. 12)

Siman 629 Seif 5:

Flax ropes are invalid *schach* but if it is made from *gemi* or *siv* it is valid.

- Even though the flax rope is not susceptible to *tumah* it should not be used for *schach* since it no longer looks like something that grew from the ground. (M.B. 13)

Siman 629 Seif 6:

A mat made from reeds, straw, shifa or *gemi*, whether it is smooth and fit for sleeping or whether it is not smooth and thus unfit for sleeping – if it is small it is assumed that it is for sleeping and is susceptible to *tumah* and may not be used for *schach* unless it was made specifically for *schach*. In other words, most people in town make it for *schach*. **If the mat is large it is assumed that it was made for *schach* and may be used for that purpose unless it was made for sleeping** (meaning that the custom is to sleep upon it)**. This discussion to a mat without a rim but if it has a rim in such a manner that makes it susceptible to *tumah* it may not be used for *schach* even if the rim was removed.** In places where they use mats as a roof they may not be used for *schach*.

- Small means that it is the correct size for sleeping. (M.B. 15)
- Once the mats are commonly used for sleeping it is susceptible to *tumah* and thus may not be used for *schach*. (M.B. 16)
- If one manufactured a mat for *schach* his intent makes it usable in places that do not have a prevailing custom but Rema teaches that if there is a prevailing custom to use the mat for sleeping his intent to use it for *schach* does not make it valid since others will not know that he made it specifically for *schach*. (M.B. 17)
- If the custom in a place is to manufacture mats for sleeping it is considered as though one manufactured the mat for sleeping. (M.B. 18)
- If the custom is not known a mat may be used as long as it is not known that it was made for sleeping. (M.B. 18)
- If the mat has a rim it is assumed that it was made to hold things and may not be used for *schach*. If it was made for *schach* with a rim there is a dispute whether it may be used for *schach*. (M.B. 19)
- Even if the mat was made for *schach* and is not susceptible to *tumah* it may not be used since people may think they could use the boards of their house for *schach*. (M.B. 21)