

Three Keys to Unlocking Talmudic *Mysteries*: Philosophy, Science, and Baseball Trivia

July 11, 2021

July 18, 2021

Maybe more

Overview of July 20 class

Review

Onward!

Three keys to figuring out what the Talmud trying to do



Define a set of plausible theories, develop each one to its strongest possible form, and identify the weaknesses that remain



Treat biblical and rabbinic statements as data against which to test each theory



Talmudic terseness reflects shared understandings to which we may not be privy

מתני' סופה שהיא גבוהה למעלה מעשרים
אמה - פסולה, ורבי יהודה מכשיר.

MISHNA A *sukka*,^N i.e., its roofing, which is the
main and most crucial element of the
mitzva, that is more than twenty cubits^B high^{HN} is unfit. Rabbi
Yehuda deems it fit.

גמ' **GEMARA**

מנא הני מילי?

Where does this come from?



Three text-based explanations for the 20 cubit height limit

Rava

- **Knowledge.** You should know you're in a sukkah, under the s'chak

R. Zeira

- **Shade.** You should sit in shade cast by the s'chak

Rabba

- **Impermanence.** You should sit in a sukka small enough to be a temporary dwelling

Theory #1, from Rabba

אָמַר רַבָּה, דְּאָמַר קָרָא: "לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ
דּוֹרוֹתֵיכֶם כִּי בַסּוּכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל", עַד עֲשָׂרִים אַמָּה - אָדָם יוֹדֵעַ
שֶׁהוּא דָר בַּסּוּכָה, לְמַעַלָּה מֵעֲשָׂרִים
אַמָּה - אֵין אָדָם יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁדָר בַּסּוּכָה,
מִשּׁוּם דְּלֹא שְׁלֵטָא בַּה עֵינָא.

Rabba said that it is derived as the verse states: "So that your future generations will know that I caused the children of Israel to reside in *sukkot* when I took them out of the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 23:43). In a *sukka* up to twenty cubits high, even without a concerted effort, a person is aware that he is residing in a *sukka*. His eye catches sight of the roofing, evoking the *sukka* and its associated mitzvot. However, in a *sukka* that is more than twenty cubits high, a person is not aware that he is residing in a *sukka* because his eye does not involuntarily catch sight of the roof, as at that height, without a concerted effort one would not notice the roofing.

Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gained a male child with the help of the LORD." Gen. 4:1

Theory #2, from Rabbi Zeira

רַבִּי זֵירָא אָמַר, מִהֶכָּא: "וְסוּכָה תְהִיָּה
לְצִלַּי יוֹמָם מִחֹרֶב", עַד עֲשָׂרִים אַמָּה –
אָדָם יוֹשֵׁב בְּצִלַּי סוּכָה, לְמַעַלָּה מֵעֲשָׂרִים
אַמָּה – אֵין אָדָם יוֹשֵׁב בְּצִלַּי סוּכָה, אֶלֶּא
בְּצִלַּי דְּפָנֹת.

Rabbi Zeira said that it is derived from here: The verse states: “And there shall be a *sukka* for shade^N in the daytime from the heat, and for refuge and cover from storm and from rain” (Isaiah 4:6). In a *sukka* up to twenty cubits high, a person is sitting in the shade of the *sukka*, i.e., the shade of the roofing; in a *sukka* that is more than twenty cubits high, a person is not sitting in the shade of the roofing of the *sukka* but rather in the shade of the walls of the *sukka*, as their considerable height provides constant shade, rendering the shade of the roofing irrelevant.

the LORD will create over the whole shrine and meeting place of

Isaiah 4:5-6

Mount Zion cloud by day and smoke with a glow of flaming fire by night. Indeed, over all the glory shall hang a canopy,

which shall serve as a pavilion for shade from heat by day and as a shelter for protection against drenching rain.

Theory #3, from Rava

וְרָבָא אָמַר, מִהֶכָּא: "בַּסּוּכּוֹת תִּשְׁבוּ
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים". אָמְרָה תּוֹרָה: כָּל שִׁבְעַת
הַיָּמִים יֵצֵא מִדִּירַת קִבְעַ וְיֵשֵׁב בְּדִירַת
עֲרָאִי. עַד עֶשְׂרִים אַמָּה – אָדָם עוֹשֶׂה
דִּירַתוֹ דִּירַת עֲרָאִי, לְמַעַלָּה מֵעֶשְׂרִים
אַמָּה – אֵין אָדָם עוֹשֶׂה דִּירַתוֹ דִּירַת
עֲרָאִי, אֶלָּא דִּירַת קִבְעַ.

Rava said that the *halakha* is derived from here: “In *sukkot* shall you reside seven days” (Leviticus 23:42).^N The Torah said: For the entire seven days, emerge from the permanent residence in which you reside year round and reside in a temporary residence, the *sukka*. In constructing a *sukka* up to twenty cubits high, a person can render his residence a temporary residence, as up to that height one can construct a structure that is not sturdy; however, in constructing a *sukka* above twenty cubits high, one cannot render his residence a temporary residence; rather, he must construct a sturdy permanent residence, which is unfit for use as a *sukka*.

Rashi

Seven days... A *sukka* of seven days, and no more. In other words, it's temporary. Light walls are enough.

Above 20 cubits. Its foundations and walls need to be fixed קִבְעַ so they don't fall.

The dialectic of Talmudic argument



R. Zeira: **Shade!** >20 cubits, shade of wall, not shade of schack

Rava: **Temporary!** >20 cubits, its permanent, not temporary



Abaye: You're invalidating a sukka that's always shaded because it's in a valley between mountains!

Abaye: You're invalidating a small sukka made with metal walls and schack on top!



R. Zeira: >20 cubits, if you imagined the walls gone, the schack would not provide shade

Rava: Impermanence matters only as a measure of height, based on customary building patterns

Overview of July 20 class

Review

Onward!



Why did they disagree?



**WHY WE
DISAGREE**



Theory #1: Why didn't the others agree with Rabbah?

כִּוְלָהֶן פְּרָבָה לֹא אָמְרֵי – הֵהוּא יְדִיעָה
לְדוֹרוֹת הַיָּא.

*. So that your
future generations will know that I caused the children
of Israel to reside in sukkot when I took them out of the
land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.*

(Leviticus 23:42–43)

Rashi on Leviticus 23:43

I caused the children of Israel to reside in
sukkot. Clouds of glory.

Gemara

They didn't all say like Rabbah, because that knowledge referenced in the biblical verse on which he relied was for the generations.

Rashi on the Gemara

That [knowledge]. The verse wasn't speaking about knowledge of sitting in the the sukka, rather about the knowledge of generations to come about the surrounding sukkot that were clouds of glory provided for the ancestors.

*. As it is taught in a baraita that the
verse states: "I made the children of Israel to reside in sukkot";
these booths were clouds of glory, this is the statement of
Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Akiva says: They established for them-
selves actual sukkot.* **Sukkah 11b**

A second explanation about knowledge for the generations, from Rabbeinu Hannanel

דירת קבע [נמי נפיק]. כולהי הני אמוראי כרבה לא אמרי משום
דסבירא להו דהאי ידיעה דכתיב בה קרא ליתא ידיעה למאן דיתיב
בסוכה דצריך היושב שיעור ידיעתו כי יושב בסכך של אותה סוכה
אלא ידיעה לדורות כלומר הדורות הבאין כיון שרואין שעושין סוכות
ומניחין בית דירתן ויושבין בימות החג בסוכה שואלין מפני מה
עושין כך ומגידין להן אבותיהם מעשה יציאת מצרים. ור' זירא סוכה

All those amoras weren't like Rabba. They didn't read "knowledge" in the verse as saying a sukka needed measurements that provided knowledge of sitting under the s'chak of that particular sukkah.

Rather, it was knowledge for the generations. In other words, the generations to come would see sukkas being made, with people dwelling and sitting in the sukka during the holiday. They would ask, "Why are they doing this?" They'd tell them, "This is how it was done for the ancestors when they came out of Egypt."

Theory #2: Why didn't the others agree with Rabbi Zeira?

רַבִּי זֵירָא נִמְי לָא אָמְרִי – הֵהוּא לִימּוֹת
הַמְּשִׁיחַ הוּא דְכָתִיב.

וְרַבִּי זֵירָא: אִם כֵּן לֵימָא קָרָא "וְחֹפֶה
תְּהִיָּה לְצִל יוֹמָם", וּמַאי "וְסוּפָה תְּהִיָּה
לְצִל יוֹמָם" – שְׁמַעְתָּ מִינָּה תַרְתִּי.

And they why didn't all say like Rabbi Zeira?
The biblical verse on which he relied was writing
about the days of the Messiah.

And Rabbi Zeira, what could he say in response?
If so, the verse should have said "And the
canopy will be a shade by day."

Why does it say instead, "And a sukka will be
for shade by day?" You learn from it two
things.

"5. And the Eternal will create over all Mt. Zion and on the meeting place a cloud by day and smoke with a glow of flaming fire by night. For over all the glory will hang a canopy.

6. And a sukka will be for shade by day and as a shelter for protection against drenching rain."

Isaiah, Chapter 4.

Rashi's comments

Gemara

And they why didn't all say like Rabbi Zeira? The biblical verse on which he relied was writing about the days of the Messiah.

And Rabbi Zeira, what could he say in response? If so, the verse should have said "And the canopy will be a shade by day." Why does it say instead, "And a sukka will be for shade by day?" You learn from it two things.

Rashi

For the days of the Messiah... Those sukkot will be for shade, for pleasure, and for privacy. However, sukkot for mitzvah purposes aren't for shade.

Two. The word "sukka" isn't used except for something that creates shade. [And] that the one for the days of the Messiah is called "sukka" because it's made for shade.



In sukkot shall you reside seven days

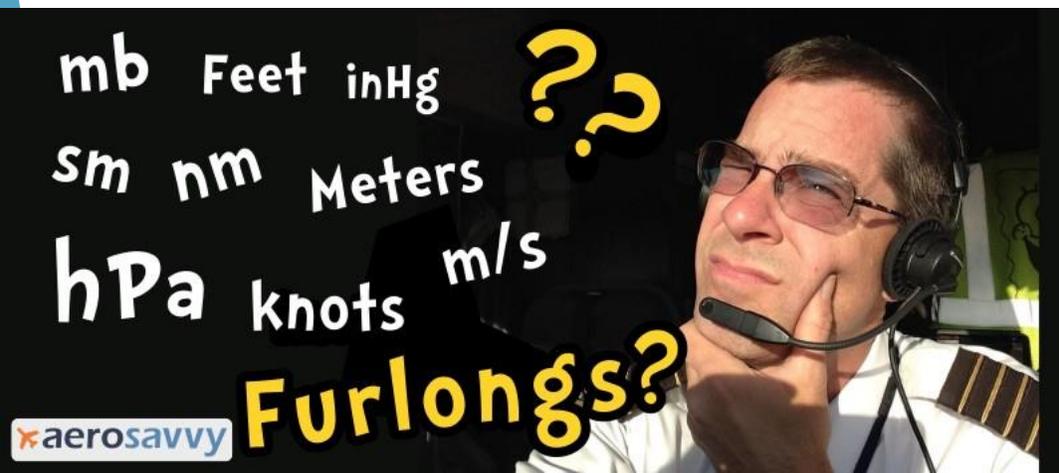
Theory #3: Why didn't the others agree with Rava?

כִּרְבָּא נִמְי לָא אָמְרִי - מִשּׁוּם קוּשְׁיָא
דְּאַבְי.

And they why didn't say like Rava?
Because of the difficulty posed by Abaye.

Rashi

Because of the difficulty posed by Abaye. About a sukka made with iron walls. And his answer didn't make sense to them. Because the verse doesn't specifically mention impermanence, we don't derive measurements from it.



Why does the Gemara treat R. Zeira differently than Rava?

R. Zeira: **Shade!** >20 cubits, shade of wall, not shade of schack

Abaye: You're invalidating a sukka that's always shaded because it's in a valley between mountains!

R. Zeira: >20 cubits, if you imagined the walls gone, the schack would not provide shade

Rava: **Temporary!** >20 cubits, its permanent, not temporary

Abaye: You're invalidating a small sukka made with metal walls and schack on top!

Rava: Impermanence matters only as a measure of height, based on customary building patterns

Gemara: Why the others didn't agree with -
R. Zeira - because the verse was about messianic times
Rava - because of Abaye's objection

Tosafot

Why didn't they say like Rabbi Zeira? [The Gemara] didn't say it was because of the difficulty posed by Abaye, like it said with Rava. [That's because] Rabbi Zeira had a good answer for Abaye.

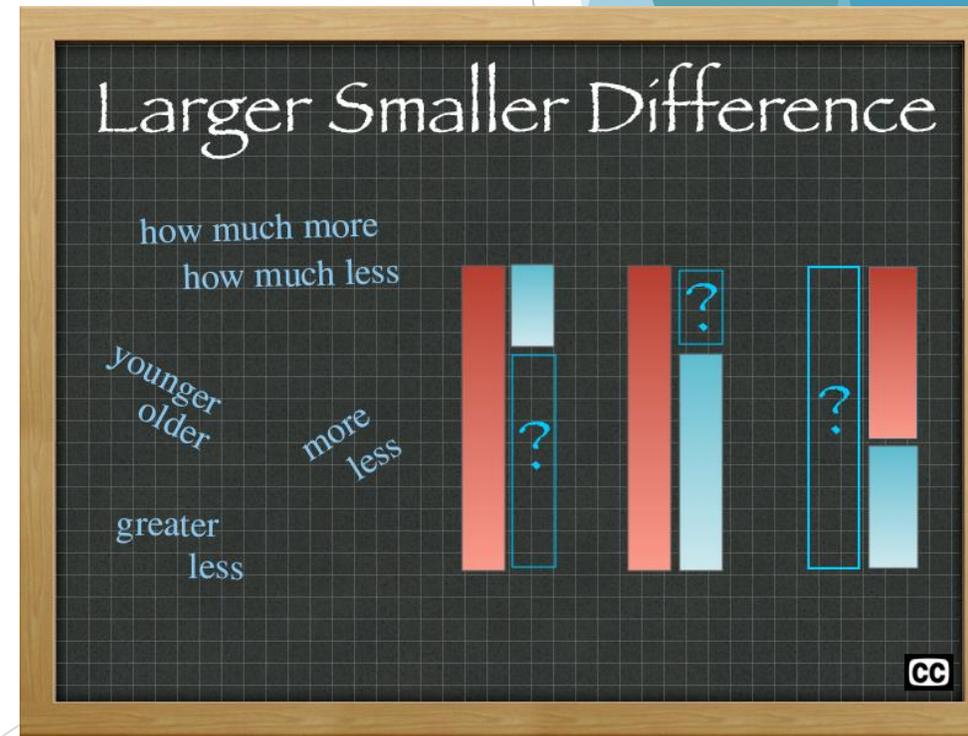
Put it nicely

How are our three contenders holding up?

Point of view	Abaye's challenge	Response to Abaye	Why others disagreed	Interpretation (I) or Response (R)
Rava: Knowledge:	None	n/a	Knowledge was for future generations	I Rashi: Reminder: clouds of glory I R. Hananel: Not about sitting in sukka. About seeing sukka, asking why.
R. Zeira: Shade	Short sukka between mountains, in eternal shade	Without mountain, schack gives shade inside sukka. Not so if imagine walls gone: shade falls outside sukka.	Biblical verse involves Messianic era, not today's sukka	R: Verse uses "Sukka," not "Canopy," shows Sukka's meaning includes shade
Rabba: Temporary	Short sukka with iron walls	Impermanence is a measure of height, not separate requirement	Abaya's challenge	R Tosafot: Zeira's answer to Abbaye was strong, so not mentioned in why others disagree. R Rashi: Verse doesn't say "temporary," so how derive measurement rule?

Narrowing the scope of our differences

MISHNA A *sukka*,^N i.e., its roofing, which is the main and most crucial element of the mitzva, that is more than twenty cubits^B high^{HN} is unfit. Rabbi Yehuda deems it fit.



Rav



Studied with
Judah the Prince
in Palestine

1st generation
Amora in
Babylonia

Started one of
two major
schools in
Babylonia

He narrowed the difference between Judah the Prince and the sages, in our Mishna. But three of his students convey different accounts of how he narrowed the difference....

And each approach to narrowing the difference has implications for our three theories about why the rabbis say that 20 cubits is too high

Narrowing #1: Rav according to Rabbi Yoshiya

כִּמְאֵן אֲזַלְא הָא דְאָמַר רַבִּי יוֹשִׁיָא
אָמַר רַב: מַחְלוּקַת בְּשָׂאִין דְּפָנוֹת
מְגִיעוֹת לְסַכָּךְ, אֲבָל דְּפָנוֹת מְגִיעוֹת
לְסַכָּךְ – אֲפִילוּ לְמַעְלָה מֵעֲשָׂרִים אַמָּה
בְּשָׂרָה. כִּמְאֵן?

§ The Gemara asks: In accordance with whose opinion is that which Rabbi Yoshiya said that Rav said: The dispute between Rabbi Yehuda and the Rabbis with regard to the fitness of a *sukka* more than twenty cubits high^H is specifically in a case where the walls of the *sukka* do not reach up to the roofing; however, in a case where the walls of the *sukka* reach up to the roofing, the Rabbis concede that even if the roofing is more than twenty cubits high, it is fit. In accordance with whose opinion is it?

כְּרַבָּה, דְאָמַר: מְשׁוּם דְלֵא שְׁלֵטָא בָּהּ
עֵינָא, וְכִיּוֹן דְּדָפְנוֹת מְגִיעוֹת לְסַכָּךְ –
מִשְׁלֵט שְׁלֵטָא בָּהּ עֵינָא.

It is in accordance with the opinion of Rabba, who says that the reason that a *sukka* that high is unfit is because the eye does not automatically catch sight of the roofing. And since the walls of the *sukka* reach the roofing, the eye catches sight of the roofing,^N as the person will follow the walls all the way up to the roofing despite their considerable height. However, if the roofing is not contiguous with the top of the walls, a person does not notice it without a concerted effort.

Rashi

The eye does not catch sight. Up the walls. And if the reason is because the Sukka is a temporary structure or because of the shade, then if the walls reach the Schack, why should the rabbis concede?

Narrowing #2: Rav according to Rav Huna

בְּמֵאן אֲזֵלָא הָא דְאָמַר רַב הוּנָא אָמַר
רַב: מַחְלֻקָּת בְּשָׂאִין בָּהּ אֵלָא אַרְבַּע
אַמּוֹת עַל אַרְבַּע אַמּוֹת, אֲבָל יֵשׁ בָּהּ
יֹתֵר מֵאַרְבַּע אַמּוֹת עַל אַרְבַּע אַמּוֹת –
אֲפִילוּ לְמַעְלָה מֵעֶשְׂרִים אַמָּה בְּשֵׁרָה.
בְּמֵאן?

The Gemara asks: In accordance with whose opinion is that which Rav Huna said that Rav said: The dispute between Rabbi Yehuda and the Rabbis with regard to the fitness of a *sukka* more than twenty cubits high is specifically in a case where there is not an area of four cubits by four cubits in the *sukka*; however, in a case where there is an area of more than four cubits by four cubits in the *sukka*, the Rabbis concede that even if the roofing is more than twenty cubits high, it is fit. In accordance with whose opinion is it?

כְּרַבֵּי זֵירָא, דְאָמַר: מְשֻׁם צֵל הוּא, וְכִיּוֹן
דְרוּיחָא – אֵיבָא צֵל סוּכָה.

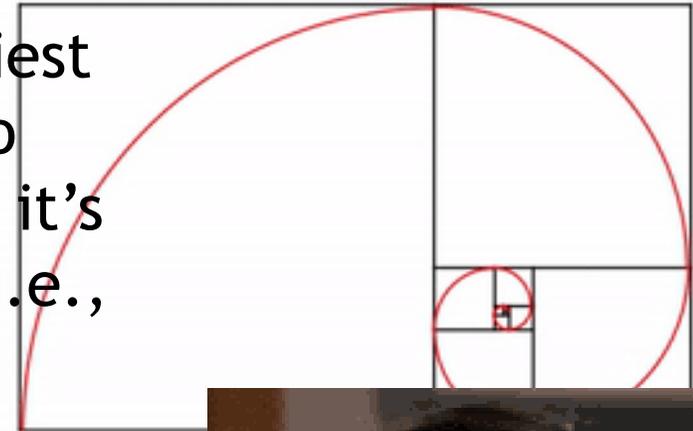
It is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Zeira, who says that a *sukka* that high is unfit due to the shade that is provided by the walls and not by the roofing; and since the *sukka* in this case is spacious and has a large area, there is shade^{NB} from the roofing of the *sukka* and not only from the walls.

Rashi

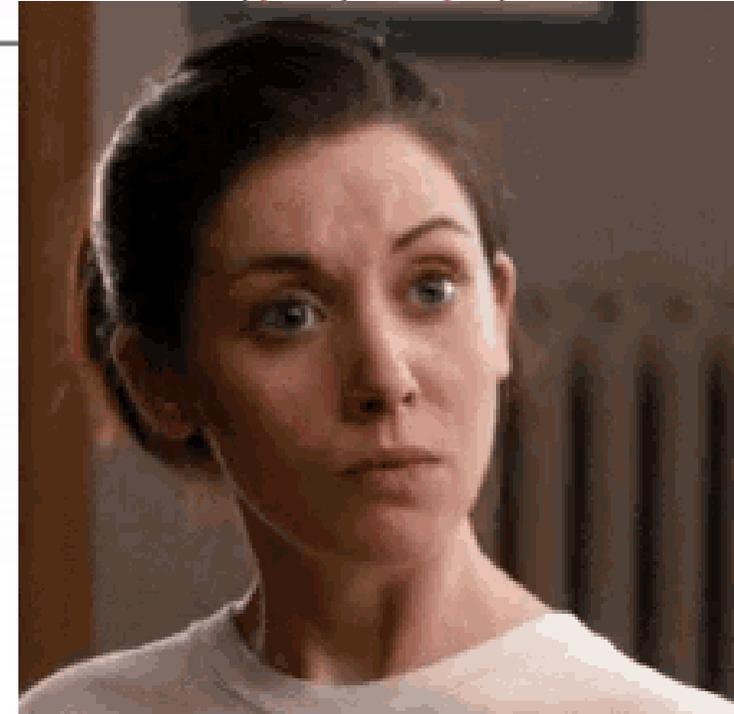
Due to the shade. If it was because of the eyes noticing it, then even if [the *sukka*] is more than 4 cubits [wide and long], the eye won't notice it.

Tosafot has something to say

This is astonishing! If, with a Sukka that's the tiniest bit wider than 4 cubits, we deem it acceptable to have it higher than 20 cubits, even by a lot, then it's certain there's no shade there from the Sukkah [i.e., the Schack].



We can say that the width is always required to go according to the height, according to the relationship between 4 cubits [of width] and 20 cubits [of height].



Tosafot has something else to say

Alternatively, perhaps the rabbis determined that, even if it was a thousand cubits high, if the sukka was more than four cubits wide, it would be impossible not to have some minimal amount of shade there from the s'chak.

It's like what we find in [Yoma 80a-b], about food the size of a large fig, which settles the mind. We say that it's a lot for the entire world, but for Og, King of Bashan, it's at least a little.

Gilyon Maharsha:

Even if the s'chak doesn't provide literal visible shade, it will reduce the heat of the sun, at least to some degree.



Abaye said to R. Zeira, “For the rabbis, it was settled that a fig’s amount of food breaks the Yom Kippur fast, as that settles the mind. Less than that doesn’t settle the mind.”... Rabbi Zeira strongly objects to this: “For the whole world [i.e., the average person], it’s a fig’s amount and for Og, King of Bashan, it’s a fig’s amount?”

Abaye said to him, “The rabbis determined that this amount settles the mind, and less than that doesn’t settle the mind. However, for the whole world, it’s a lot, and for Og King of Bashan, it’s at least a little.”

Rabbi Zeira strongly objects: “With fatty meat, a fig’s amount, and with grape leaves, a fig’s amount?”

Abaye said to him, “The rabbis determined that this amount settles the mind, and less than that doesn’t settle the mind. However, with fatty meat it’s a lot, and with grape leaves, it’s at least a little.”



“[T]he large date measure provides at least some small amount of relief even for a person of great size.. Therefore, it is the the standard measure for people of all sizes.” - *ArtScroll Tosafos, Tractate Succah*

