

## ***Sukkot FAQs: Building & Eating in the Sukkah***

*From the OU, Rabbi Eli Gersten*

- **What must be eaten in the sukkah?**

All meals that involve bread or *mezonos* must be eaten in the sukkah. However, if one is only eating fruits and vegetables, or less than a *k'beitza* (volume of an egg) of *mezonos* then a sukkah is not required. It is meritorious to eat and drink exclusively in the sukkah. One only recites the blessing “*leishev ba'sukkah*” if there is an obligation (i.e. a meal of bread or *mezonos*). During a meal, one may not eat anything outside of the sukkah, even fruits and vegetables.

- **Who is obligated to eat in the sukkah?**

Men are obligated to eat in the sukkah. Boys from the age when they can eat independent of their mothers (approximately 5-6 yrs old) are obligated to eat in the sukkah. Foods that require a sukkah, may not be given to a child to eat out of the sukkah. Women are not obligated to eat in a sukkah, but if they do so, they fulfill a mitzvah, and according to Ashkenazic tradition they may recite the blessing.

- **Are there any rules as to where a sukkah may or may not be located?**

The sukkah should not be located in an area that has a bad smell. It cannot be placed under a tree or awning. It should preferably be built on a patio, deck or driveway and not on the grass.

- **What are the minimum dimensions for a sukkah?**

A kosher sukkah must have at least 3 walls, and each wall must have a minimum length of 28 inches (7 *tefachim* x 7 *tefachim*). The walls of the sukkah must extend at least 40 inches high, and the walls may not be suspended more than 9 inches above the ground (this is a common problem with fabric sukkahs).

- **Is it a problem if my sukkah walls blow with the wind?**

The walls of a sukkah should be tied tight so they do not move with the wind. If this cannot be done, then one should install a series of tight belts or ropes that will not blow in the wind that wrap around the sukkah. The first belt is placed within 9 inches of the floor and the next within 9 inches of the first, and so on, until this series of belts reaches above 40 inches. Thus, with four or five parallel belts, one can create a *halachic* wall that does not blow with the wind.

- **What is the story with *schach* mats?**

Years ago, “putting up *schach*” referred to the tedious process of placing hundreds of single stalks of bamboo or lath across the top of one’s sukkah. Today, this task has been greatly simplified due to the proliferation of *schach* mats. However, mats that are made for sitting are not kosher for *schach*. Because these mats are made in a part of the world where it is common to make mats for sitting, it is imperative that one’s *schach* mat comes with a reliable *hashgacha*.

- **Who can place the mats on top of the sukkah?**

The mats should be placed on the sukkah by a Jew *l'sheim mitzvah* (for the purpose of the mitzvah). If it is necessary to have a non-Jew assist with the laying of the mats, a Yisroel should raise the mats slightly and lay them back down. This may be done with a pole.

- **How should the *schach* be supported?**

One should not rest *schach* directly on metal or plastic, but rather on wooden beams placed on top of the metal poles. If one's mats are woven with plastic wire, they must make sure that the *schach* is placed perpendicular to the wooden beams; otherwise the stalks are being supported exclusively by the plastic wire.

- **Can one tie their *schach* mats to the sukkah with string?**

*Schach* mats are notorious for blowing off of the sukkah. Therefore, the mats should be tied down. However, one should not tie the *schach* with wire or synthetic strings, but rather they should use cotton or hemp string or place heavy 2x4s on top of the *schach* to weigh it down.