



PARTNER PROFILE

The World Organization of Orthodox Synagogues and Communities

Making Shul Accessible

Each year, we leave our comfortable homes and move to a temporary dwelling, despite the inconveniences, out of a desire to fulfill the *mitzvah* of sitting in the *sukkah*.

Sukkot is an appropriate time to reflect on the significant challenges and inconveniences that people with disabilities face all year long and how we as a community can help them be full participants in synagogue life.

One of the most important tasks of the World Organization of Orthodox Synagogues and Communities (WOOSC) is to make synagogues accessible for people with disabilities in both Israel and the Diaspora.

The WOOSC works to make synagogues accessible to people with disabilities through education, halachic guidance and by working with professionals to solve practical challenges.

Educationally, WOOSC works to promote awareness of the challenges faced by people with disabilities, and the responsibility that the religious community bears to address these challenges.

If a wheelchair-bound individual is unable to enter a shul, it is not merely a personal problem, but a challenge that the entire community is obligated to address. And so our first priority is to create a shift in mindset, so that communities recognize the challenges of disabled people and become our partners in addressing these challenges.

It is also critically important, as a religious community, to address the

halachic issues related to people with disabilities and the shul experience. Examples include calling a blind man up to the Torah for an *aliyah*, including those on the autistic spectrum in a *minyan*, reciting *birkat kohanim* from a wheelchair, *davening* with a catheter in shul and bringing a guide dog into shul, among a myriad other issues.

WOOSC organizes rabbinic conferences and works together with halachic authorities to publish and distribute booklets addressing these questions.

The WOOSC also works with professionals to provide technical solutions for accessibility challenges in shuls.

Examples include the installation of wide doors to enable entry, creating adapted seating and bathrooms, installing Shabbat elevators, developing *siddurim* and *chumashim* written in Braille, and providing guidance for the mentally ill who want to pray in shul.

By increasing awareness and sensitivity to those struggling with complex disabilities and by working to create innovative solutions to those challenges, the WOOSC hopes to open synagogue doors to people with disabilities all over the world.

Please partner with us to promote shul accessibility for all. ■

