

THE KING'S PALACE (1)

A Beautiful Palace

The *shul* ought to be the most impressive structure in town. A town in which the homes are taller than the *shul* will be destroyed (*Rachmana litzlan*).

(שבת יא ע"א, שו"ע או"ח סי' קנ ס"ב)

When discussing the obligation to give *HaShem* the best of our possessions, the Rebbe related this principle to the building of a *shul*. From the *possuk* that says, *Zeh Keili ve'anveihu*, we learn that all *mitzvos* should be fulfilled in a beautiful manner. How much more does this apply to a house of *davening* and learning.

Thus the *Midrash* specifies that gold was created especially for the *Beis HaMikdash*. That was its prime purpose. From this we learn that only after one has donated some of his gold to *tzedaka* is he himself also allowed to benefit from it. The same applies to a *shul*: after we have built a beautiful *shul*, we may build ourselves a comfortable home.

To this the Rebbe added, "If a person would claim that for *davening* and learning it is enough to have some kind of tent, as *Yaakov Avinu* had, while his own residence is built lavishly... Is that befitting?!"

(שיח"ק תשכ"ו ע' 438)

On another occasion, the Rebbe noted that since enormous sums are spent on building all kinds of other centers, there should be increased efforts to build houses for *davening* and learning.

(תו"מ הל"ד ע' 45)

Holy Construction

In preparation to build his *shul*, the *tzaddik* Reb Shalom of Belz stayed awake for a thousand nights, learning Torah and reaching great *ruchniusdike* heights. His *Rebbetzin* stood nearby attending to his needs, and if he fell asleep for more than half an hour she would wake him up. On the thousandth night he was overcome by a deep sleep, but the *Rebbetzin* did not let him succumb, for on that night he finally attained the level for which he had waited so long.

When the *shul* was finally being built, the *tzaddik* himself would often take part in the construction, laying bricks with deep *kavana*. His older brother, Reb Leibish Rokeiach, then visiting Belz, expressed his disapproval. Reb Shalom shared with him its significance and concluded, "If I had the ability, I would build the entire edifice myself! But since I don't have the energy to do so, I'm doing whatever I am able to do."

(סיפורי חסידים זוין תורה ע' 267, 387)

On a groundbreaking for the expansion of 770 took place, in which the Rebbe participated, wearing *Shabbos* clothing and delivering a *sicha* on the significance of the event. The Rebbe explained that every edifice must be based on a foundation of *kedusha*, and that in order to build there must be a "groundbreaking" – the breaking of one's *yeshus* – the realization that the power to build comes from *HaShem*. The Rebbe then dug a hole in the ground, placed the foundation stone inside, covered it with earth, and finally distributed dollars for *tzedaka* to all those present.

(התוועדות תשמ"ח ח"ד ע' 287)

Keeping the Shul Clean and Tidy

One should show respect to a *shul* by keeping it clean, as is done in the palaces of mighty kings. Indeed, there have been great *tzaddikim* who would sweep the floor in front of the *Aron Kodesh* with their beard. Some say that by virtue of doing so, the grandfather of *Rashi* was blessed with this illustrious grandson.

(סיפורי חסידים קכח ובמקו"ח שם, ר"ח שער היראה פט"ו סמ"ב)

The Rebbe often reminded his listeners about the upkeep of the *shul*. He pointed out that a *shul* should be respected, as the *Beis Hamikdash* was, and according to some sources, this obligation is *min haTorah*. Whenever the *shul* at 770 was not properly cleaned, the Rebbe expressed pain over this, and would at times bend down himself to pick up litter.

Once the Rebbe said, "If someone were to leave litter on the floor of his home, he would be perceived as crazy, yet when litter lies on the floor of his *shul*, he does nothing to clean it up!"

On another occasion, he commented, "When a child causes a mess at home, his parents are quick to admonish him. How much more so should this apply to the *kedusha* of a *shul*, which is the home of *HaShem*!"

Once when the Rebbe came into the *shul*, he noticed some litter that had been pushed under the *bima*. He bent down, picked it up, and placed it on the table where he sat, until someone took it away. The Rebbe commented, "There is no point in hiding litter somewhere, for *HaShem* sees it there as well..."

(שיח"ק תשמ"ו ח"ג ע' 934, תשכ"ח ח"ב ע' 488, תשורה סיפוענברון תשס"ו ע' 25)

In the course of his travels, Reb Meir of Premishlan once went to *daven* in a *shul* that was in a state of dire neglect. As soon as he opened the door, he exclaimed, in the words of *Yaakov Avinu*: *Ma nora hamakon hazeh! Ein zeh ki im beis Elokim!* – "How dreadful is this place! This is no other than the house of *HaShem*!"

The *chassidim* who accompanied him assumed that with these words the holy Reb Meir was expressing some profound *ruchniusdike* insight. Seeing that they had not understood him, he explained, "This place is indeed dreadful; it is dangerous to walk around in here! It must be the house of *HaShem*, for I see that there is no one responsible for caring about its upkeep – unlike the other homes in this town, which seem to be in proper condition..."

(סיפורי חסידים זוין תורה ע' 113)

CONSIDER THIS!

- Does *HaShem* need a nice home? Why then should we invest so much to beautify it?
- Why would *Rashi*'s grandfather and the Rebbe clean the *shul* themselves? Was there no one else who could do it?