

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 ט"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 חל"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.

(התועודויות 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 קצת 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"ז ח"ג ע' 934, תשכ"ח ח"ב ע' 488, תשורה סיפוענברון תשס"ו ע' 825)

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?



THE KING'S PALACE (2)

The Kedusha of a Shul

When the stricken exiles in Bavel were beginning to despair, *HaShem* gave them a message of reassurance through the Navi Yechezkel: "Though I have sent them far away among the nations, and have scattered them throughout the lands, I have become for them a *mikdash me'at*, a miniature sanctuary, in the lands to which they have come."

Chazal explain that this refers to the *shuls* and *batei midrashim* outside Eretz Yisroel. When *Moshiach* comes, all these *shuls* and *batei midrashim* will be transplanted there.

(יחזקאל יא, טז, מגילה כט ע"א)

Chazal teach that when a Yid is in *shul*, *HaShem* is closer to him. That is why one should always make an effort to *daven* in a *shul*, where *tefillos* are best accepted. *Abbaye* said, "In the past I would *daven* in *shul* and learn at home, but I have since learnt that one should learn in *shul* as well."

HaShem fills the entire world. Nevertheless, out of his love for us, He designated special places to reveal Himself, as in the *Beis HaMikdash*.

(ירושלמי ברכות פ"ה ה"א, ר"ח שער היראה פט"ו)

Showing Respect

A *shul* must be treated with great respect, for it is the resting place of the *Shechinah*.

When Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua was asked why he merited long life, he attributed it to his respect for *shuls*: he had never used a *shul* as a shortcut. Similarly, Rabbi Zeira was blessed with a long life for never having slept, even briefly, in the *beis midrash*.

When Rabbi Yochanan was informed that there were elderly people in Bavel, he was surprised, for the Torah only promises long life to those who live in Eretz Yisroel. However, when he heard that these people

spent long hours in *shul*, he said, "This was their merit."

Similarly, Rav Assi said, "When a *shul* is used for mundane activities, this shortens the lives of the city's inhabitants."

(מגילה כז ע"ב, ברכות ח ע"א)

The Smak, one of the great *rishonim*, writes: Inappropriate behavior in *shul* will cause the *shul* to later become a place of negative conduct, such as *avoda zara*.

(סמ"ק מצוה יא, מג"א סי' קנ"א סק"א)

Reb Chaim Vital writes that his Rebbe, the *AriZal*, would entirely refrain from speaking in *shul*, even words of inspiration, so that this should not lead to any mundane speech.

(שער הכוונות סוף דרושי כוונת הברכות, מג"א סי' קנ"א סק"ג)

In HaShem's Presence

The *Shulchan Aruch* rules that it is forbidden to behave frivolously while in *shul*. This includes joking and idle conversation.

A *shul* may not be used as a shortcut or as a refuge from the weather. Eating and sleeping in a *shul* is inappropriate, unless for the benefit of a *mitzva*.

Furthermore, one should not kiss young children in *shul*, in order to implant in one's own heart that no love is comparable to the love of *HaShem*.

(שו"ע סי' קנ"א ס"א, שו"ע אדה"ז סי' צ"ח ס"א)

On the occasion of his son's *opsheerenish*, a young chossid brought his son to 770 and arrived in time for *Mincha*. During *davening* the little boy began to cry, so his father calmed him by stroking him warmly and then kissed him lightly on his forehead.

The following morning, the chossid received a phone call from the Rebbe's secretary: there was a note from the Rebbe waiting for him in the office. The young

man, quite surprised, hurried to 770. Together with the standard *bracha* for his son, there was a note: "See *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, *Siman* 13, *Se'if* 1." There the young father read: "One may not kiss his children in *shul*, in order not to show any love other than for *HaShem*..."

(כפר חב"ד גליון 300 ע' 24)

In our times, many *shuls* are made without the full *kedusha* of a "*Beis Haknesses*" so that mundane activities (such as eating and resting) are permitted there. However, it is still forbidden to perform frivolous activities there, for these are degrading to the holy environment.

(מג"א סי' קנ"א סקי"ד, משנ"ב שם סק"ב)

On one of his travels, the Rebbe Rashab once saw a young boy acting wildly and foolishly in *shul*. He called the child over and reprimanded him, explaining that since he was now in a *shul*, a *mikdash me'at*, he should behave properly.

(רשימות דברים ח"ב ע' ק"י)

In *shul*, as in a royal palace, one should act humbly. For example, one should not shout across a *shul* to call someone.

In an unsigned letter written by one of the first Rebbeim, it is written: "One should enter a *shul* with humility and with a fear of the King of kings, *HaShem*. The Torah tells us to stand in awe of the *Beis Hamikdash*, and the same applies to a *shul*, which is called a *mikdash me'at*. One should not engage in any idle talk the entire time he is there. Those who act in this way will merit many blessings, in this world and in the next – and we will merit the coming of *Moshiach*."

(ר"ח שער היראה פט"ו, אג"ק אדה"ז אדהאמ"צ אדה"צ ח"א ע' שעז)

CONSIDER THIS!

■ When is *HaShem* in *shul*: during *davening* or at all times?