

Good Shabbos Everyone. Anyone who has ever been to Yerushalayim can testify to the strong feelings a Jew experiences when visiting the holiest city in the world. The center of holiness in Yerushalayim is the Har Habayis, where the Bais HaMikdash stood. Yerushalayim is the main pipeline through which all prayers go up to heaven. And the Bais HaMikdash was the faucet for that pipeline.

Unfortunately the Bais HaMikdash was destroyed and we speedily await its rebuilding every day. Thankfully, Hashem has promised us that even without the Bais HaMikdash, we can still reach Him with prayer. The primary place for prayer is now with a minyan in our shuls. Our shuls are mini-sanctuaries which temporarily take the place of the Bais HaMikdash in Yerushalayim. As the Prophet Yechezkel tells us "Thus said the L-rd Hashem/G-d: Though I have removed them far away among the nations and though I have scattered them among the lands, yet I have been for them a small sanctuary..." (11:16) The commentator Metzudas Dovid explains the verse to mean: Even though we may be exiled among the nations and we are far away from the Bais HaMikdash in Yerushalayim, we should build small sanctuaries - shuls so that Hashem may dwell among them. Just as the Bais HaMikdash was a dwelling place for Hashem's holy presence, so too are our shuls the dwelling place of Hashem.

The idea that we must build shuls for Hashem is hinted to in a verse in this week's Parsha Terumah: "Make for Me a holy house and I will dwell in them." (Shemos 25:8) The simple meaning of this verse according to Rashi, is that the Bnai Yisroel must build the Bais HaMikdash. Grammatically, it would seem to make sense that verse should say: "Make for Me a holy house and I will dwell in it." Commentators note from the fact that the verse states: "and I will dwell in them," that the verse is hinting to Hashem's desire to dwell not only in the Bais HaMikdash, but in every holy house that we build for Hashem, namely shuls. That is why the verse uses the plural "them."

Just as the Bais HaMikdash was a dwelling place for Hashem's holy presence, so too are our shuls the dwelling place of Hashem. Therefore, walking into a shul we should keep in mind that we are walking into a Mikdash Me'at, a miniature version of the Bais HaMikdash in Yerushalayim. The Bais HaMikdash was so great that merely seeing it had the power to put a Jew on the proper path in his service of Hashem. (Rav Avrohom Shorr) We should therefore be struck with awe (moirah) when coming into Hashem's house. After the passing of Reb Menachem Mendel of Kotsk, his Chassidim took upon themselves the leadership of Reb Yitzchak Meir of Ger, who lived at the time in Warsaw. After a few years in Warsaw, Reb Yitzchok Meir thought it preferable that he move to a small town. The number of Chassidim coming to visit him and to hear his teachings had grown to thousands, and he did not think it advisable that the younger scholars should spend long periods in a big city. The word spread like wildfire, and from all directions came requests from representatives of communities that Reb Yitzchok Meir become their spiritual leader. None of these invitations were accepted, until an invitation came from the small town of Ger (Gora Kalwaria) near Warsaw, and this the rebbe accepted at once. At first the rebbe lived in the house which the people of Ger kept for the local rav, and his Chassidim studied and prayed in the community's beis midrash. Seeing, however, that this building could not accommodate the thousands of Chassidim who streamed there from all parts of Poland, the more prosperous amongst the Chassidim undertook to build a fitting residence for their rebbe, and next to it a spacious shul for his Chassidim. At the festive dedication of the Shul the rebbe entered the grand edifice for the first time, surrounded by huge crowds of Chassidim, and his joy at the completion of the mitzvah was beautiful to see. His address for the occasion spoke of what entering a beis midrash can do for a Jew.

He began with the Mishnah which explains: that on the day that Rabban Gamliel was removed from the office of nasi, they removed the guard from the door of the House of Study, and permission was granted to all talmidim to enter. When Rabban Gamliel had been nasi, he used to announce: "Any talmid whose inside does not match his external appearance - let him not enter the Bais Midrash." On the day that Rabban Gamliel left office, many benches were added in the Bais Midrash, because many students who had been denied admission were now let in. Rabban Gamliel saw this and was in distress. Why was Rabban Gamliel in distress? "Rashi," continued Reb Yitzchak Meir of Ger, "explains this last phrase by saying that Rabban Gamliel was worried that he would be punished for not having allowed those talmidim - students to enter while he was in charge. The question, though, still stands: what changed Rabban Gamliel's thinking? What made him regret his earlier policy of not letting in talmidim who were not inside as they appeared outside?"

And the answer is as follows: Rabban Gamliel watched what happened to these latter talmidim as they entered the study hall: their very entry there made them immediately fix their avairas. And this explains Rabban Gamliel's worry. He regretted not having let them in earlier, for then they might have done teshuvah long before." (A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Torah, p. 264 Reb S.Y. Zevin, Meir Holder, trans.)

With all the turmoil going on in the world, we can look to our shuls and our study houses as "safe houses" where we can go to learn Hashem's Torah and talk to Hashem. And as we pray towards Yerushalayim in our shuls, we ask Hashem to answer our prayers and bring better times. As Yishaya prophesied: "And it shall come to pass in the end of days that the mountain of Hashem's house shall be set over all other mountains and lifted high above the hills and all the nations shall come streaming to it. And many peoples shall come and say: Come let us go up to the Mountain of G-d to the house of the G-d of Jacob and He will teach us His ways and we will walk in His paths. For out of Tzion shall go forth the Torah and Hashem's word from Yerushalayim." (2:2-3) **Good Shabbos Everyone.**