

hilchot beit haknesset

By Daniel Siegel

introduction

During a recent pilgrimage to Israel (it might well have been in the bomb-and-blackout days and nights of the Yom Kippur War), during one of my many wanderings to the Wall (it might well have been the dusk-and-evening of Simchat Torah), I considered how the stones have been neglected in the short space of 8 years. As the Jews got used to the since-'67 freedom of walking into the Old City, in and out of alleys and squeeze-narrow streets, down to the Wall, I thought, "How many speeches and sermons and casual remarks about Our Greatest Symbol—the Wall—have I heard?" Painters, poets, artists, Jews-in-general-and-particular referred to the Wall, painting it, singing it, ho-humming about it, revering it, retelling the tale of its Redemption from Captivity (a great Mitzvah, applicable not only to people, but also to books, gravestones, Torahs). More and more often than not, the lyricist or casual or enraptured Jew would be hundreds or thousands of miles away, recalling second-hand the configuration of the stones, the doves flying around it and settling down there to rest, the plants growing out of it—and the thousands of *Tzettelach*—the most personal Messages to God, placed by every kind of hand and heart in every recess within reach.

But usually he was not *there*, this Jew, not approaching it over the plaza, not craning his neck to see the top, not touching it, not kissing it.

It had become a symbol!

Of course the Wall is a symbol! But it is primarily a Presence, and the Jewish world is bursting with presences coming out to greet whoever breathes and walks and touches with a sense of Jewish happenings happening wherever he goes.

Simply consider what we Jews kiss: mezuzot, the tzitzit on our tallit, a Sefer Torah, other Jews who fill our hearts with a memory and presence of Egypt (consider a newly-arrived immigrant from Leningrad, Kiev, Vilna) and a memory and presence of Sinai (consider a friend who has just revealed a new spark of Torah).

How does "The Wall" as a symbol compare to other symbols such as a Sefer Torah or Mezuzah? From what does each gain its importance?

Consider the benefits of using concrete symbols to help understand concepts or ideas. What are some of the limitations in using symbolism?

Visitors to Israel find a unique fascination with all "The Wall" embodies. Is this attachment a form of idolatry?

What does the phrase תורה מסיני, "Torah from Sinai" mean?

[It is usually taken to refer to God's presence at Mt. Sinai, giving the Torah. However, Dr. Jose Faur, of the Jewish Theological Seminary, suggests that it may also be considered temporally: the process of Torah, commencing with Sinai, continues through today. That is, "Torah from (the time of) Sinai."]

While a friend may also be a symbol of friendship, primarily we long for him to be a friend, an intimate link with the reality and nature of Heaven&Earth —more to be heart-touched, talked to, and listened to than to be spoken of in symbolic terms. In moments of sorrow or joy, we crave the hand or embrace or consolation-words of our friend more than any thoughts in a time-and-space distance of "What my friend in the abstract means to me."

A Jew may readily list 10, 15, 20 common symbols of his Jewish life: a lulav & etrog, tfillin, ner tamid, Torah, Shabbat, spices, wine, menorah, a chimney, tallit, shofar, apple&honey and on and on. The touchability, seeability, sniffability, and tastability of these symbols is critical to their reality, and may be fully vivified only when their concrete presence is sensed first. Afterwards, and only afterwards, should the abstract nature of a symbol be considered, extended, and metaphorized.

With the approach of the New Year 5736—early this year (USY ers will hardly have the opportunity to sleep off their encampments before it is time to put on the Yontiff clothes and tote the Heavy Maḥzor to synagogue)—it was considered opportune to prepare material connected with the Yamim Nora'im, The Days of Awe. Jews everywhere, even those who consider themselves non-religious or doubtful or apathetic, come to synagogue to participate in a ceremony and celebration of God-and-Man and Man-and Man together. A study of the building and details of the synagogue would be helpful in making the student more aware of what the structure and its functions and possibilities offer to everyone. Much as Rabbi Max Arz't's book *Justice and Mercy*, opened the Maḥzor and the Siddur to its readers, so, too, this guide is intended to take the larger symbol—the synagogue—and some of the symbols within it, and make them more understandable and familiar to anyone who enters the boundaries of the building.

An honest teacher realizes it is a difficult task to ready his students for Mitzvot (whether it is sensitization to the awe of hearing a shofar or wishing him well on a journey to Eretz Yisrael). However, a bond of sympathy is established, I believe, when the student realizes that the teacher is also a student, with questions, doubts, and difficulties present along with the moments of exaltation and sublimity. We are all students of Torah, assuming the work in good faith and with a sense of ultimate understanding, with the help of Him, Who is the ultimate Torah-Teacher.

Daniel Siegel
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Is the synagogue a symbol? Is it "the larger symbol" containing many smaller symbols? Does the synagogue structure serve to symbolize one thing to the Jewish community using it and something else — at the same time — to the non-Jewish community viewing it? Does this multi-functional role apply to other symbols?

The relationship of study and action is an interesting one. In what ways will the study aspects of this unit influence the action USYers undertake?

It is hoped that, in part, learning to appreciate the values of the synagogue will encourage USYers to strengthen their ties with all aspects of the programs undertaken there. We hope, as well, that through arts and crafts projects at the regional encampments, many USYers will create new or traditional symbols which will be shared with the home synagogue, either to be shown on display or to be used with other ritual objects during the year. Each USYer is not only a member of his chapter, but also of his synagogue.

HILCHOT BEIT HAKNESSET

USY, although stressing the importance of home observance, is to a large degree a synagogue-oriented organization. Its members are frequently meeting, praying, and studying inside buildings variously referred to as synagogues, shuls, temples or Batay Kneset. These synagogues range in size, style, and organization from the modest Bnai Isaac of Aberdeen, South Dakota, to the small-but-larger one in Spokane, Washington, all the way up to the over-20-acres complex of Beth Shalom in Kansas City. Leisure time at kinnusim and conventions and encampments is often filled with give-and-take discussion about the nature of the USYer's experience as he grew up in his own particular synagogue: under a tree at HaNegev's encampment in Hendersonville, North Carolina, a USYer from Huntsville, Alabama will listen and react to what it was like "growing up Jewish" at Ahavath Achim in Atlanta. It is the purpose of this source material to make a formal study of the traditional texts concerning the Beit Kneset. By examining the Halacha-laws relating to this institution, it is hoped that USYers will gain a sharpened sense of what a synagogue is and what it can be, should be, might be, would be, ought to be.

Upon entering this world, the Jewish youth, naturally enough, played no part in determining what their synagogue would be like. It was inherited, in most instances, from the post-War generation and its particular sense of values. More and more, however, USYers have asked to take an active role in their synagogue's activities, and in many cases, the USY president sits on the synagogue board as a voting or non-voting member. In addition, during the college years and afterwards, out in the Great Big Wide World Out There, the former USYer will have to make decisions for himself: what synagogue do I join, how do I take an active, meaningful part in its work, what do I do now, seeing that the building must be moved—what shall it look like? What is to be built first? The school? The sanctuary?

All of these decisions demand a refined sense of Jewish values, and it is hoped that some of this material, and supplemental material in later years, will be a guide in the decision-making processes. Indeed, when the USYers of Columbus, Georgia constructed their own chapel, in the woods behind the synagogue, they fully realized the importance of preliminary investigation: what exactly *does* constitute a synagogue? What are the priorities? What is absolutely essential, and what is only secondary? The result of their study and building is a credit to the process of Talmud and Ma'aseh—study and Mitzvah—activity.

The Shulḥan Aruch (and its various commentaries) has been selected as the basis of the study material, because it is an excellent starting point for the study of any topic of Jewish-Legal importance. Since the 16th Century when Rav Yosef Karo compiled the text in Tzefat it has served as the Basic Basis (though not the exclusive one) for Halachic-legal matters in Jewish life.

Unfortunately, there is no complete translation of the Shulḥan Aruch, so I have attempted to make the text readable, while retaining as much as possible the literal meaning of the text. Translations which "sweeten" the harsher aspects of Jewish tradition often do a great injustice and disservice to the serious student of Torah, and he often finds himself asking, "Just *what does* the original state?" I, therefore, chose to be as faithful to the original Hebrew as possible. It is, of course, preferable to study directly from the original, and even if the USYer cannot do this in every instance, there are enough passages where the Hebrew is easily understandable, that it would be beneficial to refer to the Hebrew wherever and whenever possible.

Two notes, one philological-etymological, and one existential-lyrical:

(1) There are many terms we use for a synagogue. I would like to summarize their essential, literal meanings. By listening to which term a person uses to refer to something, we may often discover what his specific relationship to that thing is. Connotatively speaking, a temple is hardly identical with a shul. Denotatively, these are the terms----

Bet Knesset בית כנסת : a gathering-house. The root כנס as in Kinnus, Knesset, means to get together.

Synagogue: the *Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon* defines synagogue **συναγωγὴ** as a bringing together, a gathering, a place of assembly.

Temple: The *Oxford Universal Dictionary* derives the word from the Latin *templum*, giving the following definitions: 1. An edifice or place regarded primarily as the dwelling-place or 'house' of a deity or deities; hence, an edifice devoted to divine worship. b. *spec.* the sacred edifice at Jerusalem, the House of the Lord. . . . 2. *transf.* [in transferred use] a building dedicated to public Christian worship, a church, esp. applied to a large or grand edifice.

Shtiebl שטיבל : a Yiddish word meaning "A room." From the German *Stube*, room.

Shul שול : Yiddish, from the German *Schule*, meaning a school.

(2) Suffice it to say that any USYer who has been a participant in the Eastern European Pilgrimage, and who has been in the synagogues of Moscow, Kiev, Leningrad, Prague, Cracow, Budapest, Tblisi, or Warsaw has been radically re-oriented as to what a shul is all about, how a Jew and his unique building interact, what values are important and which are not-so-important. Just *being there* and praying with the Jews of Eastern Europe brings on an immense feeling of new perspective. I was privileged to be a part of the 1972 Eastern European Pilgrimage Staff, and have attempted at certain points in the text to bring moments of that experience to bear on the Shulhan Aruch's insights.

One final note. I would like to thank my חבר, מורה, ורב, Rabbi Jonathan Porath, with whom I originally prepared the preliminary material on this subject a few years ago for a CHUSY convention. For the past 16 years we have been Torah-Chaverim, sharing דרך ארץ וסתרי תורה, insights into the Words and the World. His absolutely unique sense of Halacha, Mitzvot, and Talmud Torah have been a בוצינא דנהורא, a flaming torch of light in my life, studies, and writings.

When he took me by the hand through the Soviet Union and taught me the ways of Warsaw, Cracow, Mauthausen, Majdanek, and Auschwitz, I knew we would forever be tied together soul-to-soul.

May it be His will that we continue together in such fashion for the next 90 years.

Daniel Siegel

It must be pointed out that while the Shulhan Aruch is an extremely important source for studying Jewish law, it represents an approach and an authority of one time period in the span of Jewish history. Thus, the legal decisions summarized in the Shulhan Aruch reflect social and economic conditions of the Middle Ages, interpreting and explaining laws and customs which often originated much earlier, either during biblical or talmudic times. On the other hand, halachic decisions made today, for instance, by the Conservative Movement, take into consideration such previous legal decisions (recorded in codes and compilations such as the Arba'ah Turim, the Shulhan Aruch, Rambam's Mishnah Torah, with their many commentaries) as well as scientific advancements or social conditions which may necessitate further research or study before establishing a statement of law. In addition, practices of the Conservative Movement are shaped, to a degree, by conditions which may differ from one locality to another, but are rooted in the many precedents handed down to us combined with constant re-evaluation of present circumstance. It is with this understanding of process, nonetheless, that the basis of our studies will be a text written shortly after 1500, and the various commentaries on it. As the study material makes clear, this is a "starting point," a handle by which we can first grasp our topic with deliberate direction.

Beit Knesset is, literally "House of Assembly." The plural is Batay Knesset (בתי כנסת), "Houses of Assembly."

הלכות בית הכנסת

קנ בנין ביה ושיהיה נבנה וכו ה סעיפים :

א * ° ח כופין בני העיר זה את זה לבנות א [ביה ולקנות להם תורה נביאים א (ג) וכתובים

HILCHOT BEIT HAKNESSET From the Shulhan Aruch Orah Hayyim

150: Building a Synagogue, and How High It Should Be

150:1 Members of a community may force each other to build a Beit Knesset, and to buy a Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings.

force: Talmudic and Halachic texts allow for the use of societal and peer-group pressure at certain times, for the sake of particular Mitzvot. For example, in some situations, pressure may be applied on individuals to contribute to certain Tzedakah-projects.

force: And even the minority [of the community] may force the majority. (Mishna Berura)

force: And so much the more so, in small communities, members may force one another to come to the Bet Knesset to fill out the 10 men needed for a minyan, if it does not cause undue difficulties for the man. (Ateret Zekaynim)

build: And if they don't have the means to build, in any event they are required to rent a place to be set aside for prayer. (Mishna Berura)

build: One [halachic authority] has written that a synagogue should not be built by idol worshippers. (Be'ur Halachah referring to the Birkay Yosef)

Prophets: Some congregations still use handwritten scrolls of the Prophets for the reading of the Haftarah.

Writings: So that anyone from the congregation may read them. It appears to me that this rule applies only in those days when only Torah, Prophets, and Writings were written, but now they are required to purchase Talmuds for young and old to study from. (Magen Avraham)

Writings: With the advent of printing and the easy accessibility of books, a simple extension of this law is to make sure provision is made for a library in the Beit Knesset. Everyone should be allowed the opportunity of enjoying the use of Jewish books free of charge.

The Hebrew text of the Shulhan Aruch has, as can easily be noticed, many extra letters and little signs scattered throughout almost every sentence. These letters — in various type styles — indicate footnotes. They are used to show the many commentators' notes, explanations, and quotation sources, scattered around the main text on all sides and frequently in the margin, as well. Thus, in the first line we are studying the following marks point out footnotes:

א * ° ח כופין בני העיר זה את זה לבנות א [ביה ולקנות להם תורה נביאים א (ג) וכתובים

The various sections of the Shulhan Aruch are numbered, which allows for easier cross referencing; each "sub-paragraph" is also numbered. We are beginning with א קנ , which is Paragraph #150:1, in the portion entitled Orah Hayyim.

What is meant by "those days..."? Don't forget the original distinction between the "Written Torah" (the Bible) and the "Oral Torah" (Talmud). Later, of course, both were kept in written form.

Is a book (primarily a "traditional" text) to be considered a symbol? What is the significance of Jews being called the "People of the Book"? Is that "Book" the Torah, or any sacred text?

The synagogue library should become a haven for non-stealing. Libraries everywhere are depleted by borrowers who never return the books, to the detriment of the rest of the community. On the door of the Vancouver, B.C., J.C.C. library there is a copy of an article from some American newspaper reporting that some of these "forever-borrowers" in an Arizona town were prosecuted and put in jail, since, by law, this "procedure" is considered stealing. Libraries in synagogues should eliminate any urge for ethical "sloppiness" or common inconsideration.

In the last synagogue in Leningrad there is a locked book room with some 10,000 volumes of Talmud, Law Codes, and other Jewish texts to which the Jews are denied access. In Warsaw, old books are stacked in big piles in the synagogue, for lack of Jews to study them. It is impossible to take them out of the country, other than one by one (with the permission of the Gabbai), and even then, there is the risk that they will be confiscated at the border. How very much we ought to take advantage of our North American Jewish freedom and vitality by putting to full use the books jamming the shelves of our local synagogue libraries!

In many communities across North America, Jewish organizations sponsor book sales, the proceeds of which go to Brandeis University, the local community, or some similar institution. In Chicago, the Brandeis Book Fair is housed in a circus tent—so many are the volumes being offered for sale. Among these books are numerous Old Siddurim, Maḥzorim, and religious texts, no doubt brought to this country by someone's father or grandmother or great-uncle. Now the children and grandchildren can no longer read or understand the Hebrew or Yiddish, and more likely than not, joke books, paperbacks on gardening, and the like are grabbed up at the sale before these Sefarim are examined and purchased. It should be our responsibility to buy books such as these, wherever they are on display, and to make a point of learning the Hebrew or Yiddish well enough to bring the Words back to life.

It is unfortunate that too many books in Jewish libraries look too-new, too-fresh, too-never-having-been-leafed-through. They look nice: like cosmeticized corpses in some funeral homes where the deceased "looks like he just got back from a vacation in Miami."

Though books that look "too new" may never have been read it is important to remember that books should be treated carefully, and not made to look old before they are!

Is there any sense in not placing a Siddur, Ḥumash, volume of Talmud, etc., upside down, or in turning it right-side up if you see it put down the wrong way on a table?

If you are using both the Hebrew quotation and English translation you will note that in paragraphs where part of the original is omitted, the part which appears in translation is underlined in Hebrew.

The word "Note" which appear in many of the paragraphs is used to translate הגהה. Actually, while the main body of the Shulhan Aruch was written by Yosef Karo (and leans toward practices of the Sephardic communities) there are frequent "notes" offered by Rav Moses Isserles (known from his initials as the Rama, רמ"א) citing the Ashkenazic practice. Sometimes "note" will be an interpretation of Karo's ruling or will give further detail; often it provides a different opinion.

ב א * אין בונין ביה אלא בנבחה של עיר ג ומנביהין אותו עד שיהיה נבוח מכל בתי
 (ג) העיר משתמשים בהם לאפוקי בירניות [פי' בנינים הסמוים לניו חרום שיהיה החמה ביריות
 שפיון] ומגדלים שאין משתמשים בהם ונג שהוא משופע ואינו ראוי לתשמיש ד משערין עד
 המקום שהוא ראוי לתשמיש (א) דהיינו שאם יש עלייה תחת הנג לא תהא נבוח יות' מב'ה :
 הנה ובשפת הדמק' לו שיש איתם מלכות שאין רשאים לנטח ב'ה כרינו נוסף להחפול בנימ אש'פ' שדרין בשליה על בניו ונגוד
 ענהנו בשליה שעלנו בנקבות כמו שיחבאר סוף סימן קל"א [ב"י סי' קל"ד בשם מהר"י בן חנינ'] :

150:2 The Beit Knesset must be built on the high point of the city. It must be high enough so that it is higher than any other of the city's buildings that are in use. . . . [Note: In time of distress or when there is fear of the government which prevents them from building a Beit Knesset according to these rules, it is permissible to pray in a house, even though people live upstairs, as long as the people upstairs keep their quarters clean.]

the city's buildings: Nowadays we are not so fastidious about this, since the government buildings are so high, there is no easily recognizable distinction for the synagogue building. (Ba'er Hetev [18th Century, Poland])

Naturally, in skyscraper-cities, this quality of "identifiability-by-height" cannot be preserved, though there are some smaller towns where, in specific neighborhoods, it would be possible to build a building so that its height would readily make it stand out.

Alternatively, the architecture and structure of the building ought to be such that from a distance the Beit Knesset will be immediately perceived as being of great importance to the community.

distress. . . fear of the government: In certain times under Roman rule, and during Inquisition and post-Inquisition times, we may easily imagine groups of Jews gathering in people's homes to pray secretly. For an interesting literary treatment of this theme, read "The Legend of the Last Jew on Earth" in Arthur A. Cohen's *In the Days of Simon Stern*, Dell paperback, pp. 120-152.

There were times when the ruling Christian authorities would not permit the synagogue to be the highest structure in a city, so the rabbis ingeniously suggested that the synagogue be "built down" (i. e., below ground level). In that way, even if the building did not appear to be the tallest structure, it did have, in fact, the longest measurement from top to bottom. Does such ingenuity fulfill the original purpose of this law? Does it add to or detract from the value of the whole legal system? Is there merit to such a "compromise" or is the solution merely a test of mental acrobatics?

ג ° ה מי שהגביה ביתו יותר מבית הכנסת יש אומרים שכופין אותו להשפיל

150:3 If a man has made his house higher than the Beit Knesset, there are those who say he may be forced to lower it.

higher: By extension, making a private home more lavish or fancy than the Beit Knesset would be considered, perhaps, an act of shaming the Beit Knesset.

Do you think the "extension" holds true, or that height, not lavishness, was the real thrust of the law?

ה' ה' אין פותחין פתח ביה אלא כנגד העד (ו) שמתפללין
 בו באותה העד שאם מתפללים למערב יפתחוהו
 למזרח כדי שישתחוו מן הפתח נגד הארון שהוא כרוח
 שמתפללין נגדו : הגב ו' ועשין (ז) בימה נחמט ב"ס שימש
 עליו הקורא נשיה וישמעו כלם ושמתחלל הש"ץ מני כלפי הקדש (ב) אסור
 הישיבה ק' סוף הקנים יושבים פניהם כלפי הש"ץ אסור הש"ס כלם יושבים
 שורות שורות פניהם כלפי הקודש ומני הזקנים (טו) :

150:5 . . . [Note: The bimah is to be placed in the center of the Beit Kneset. This is where the Torah-reader shall stand, so that everyone may hear. When the sheliaḥ Tzibbur prays, he shall face the Holy (Ark). The seating plan is as follows: the elders sit in rows facing the congregation, and the rest of the people sit in rows facing the Ark and the elders.]

The bimah: There should be no more than 6 steps leading up to the Bima. (Magen Avraham quoting the Zohar)

The dangers of an ultra-high bima are well illustrated by the following story from the Jerusalem Talmud [Yevamot 12:6]:

The townpeople of Simoniah came to Rabbi [Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi] and said, "We would like to have a man who can interpret Torah for us, judge us, supervise our Beit Kneset activities, teach us elementary and advanced Torah, and oversee whatever our needs might be."

Rabbi gave them Levi bar Sisi.

The Simonians made him a big bimah, sat him upon it, and approached him with a Halachic question. He did not answer.

They asked him another, and he did not answer.

They said, "Perhaps he is not an expert in Halachah. Let us ask him something from Aggadah." So they asked him to explain a verse from the Book of Daniel—and he still did not answer.

They went back to Rabbi and said, "Is this the way you satisfy our requests?"

He replied. "I swear I have given you a man as good as myself. Bring him here."

Rabbi asked him the same three questions, and he immediately gave substantial worthy answers. So he asked, "Why did you not answer them when they asked?"

He replied, "They made me this huge bimah, and sat me upon it, and I became so wrapped up in my own self-importance, I could not function properly."

The bimah: And when the Sheliaḥ Tzibbur is ready to lead the prayers, he goes down to the ground [floor] in front of the Ark, with his face towards the Ark like the rest of the people. (Tur, Oraḥ Ḥayyim, 150, end)

Not only in the case of teaching or delivering a sermon, such as was true with Levi bar Sisi, but particularly for prayer, it is of the utmost importance that the leader should be physically at a lower station. Archeological finds in Israel have substantiated that the Sheliaḥ Tzibbur, when leading the prayers, would stand on a level lower than the congregation because "From the depths I call out to you" [Psalms 130:1], being on a lower physical level encourages the humility necessary for prayer.

in the center: This is an ancient custom. . . . In some locations they have torn down this custom of our ancestors by placing the bimah next to the Holy Ark, because they desired to follow the ways of the goyim as they do in their temples. One may describe them by the following verse, "Israel forget their Creator by building temples." [Hosea 8:14] (Be'ur Halachah)

In some modern synagogues, the congregants are returning to this principle, placing the bimah among the people. In sanctuaries where there are no permanent seats, it would be a relatively simple matter to rearrange the location of the Torah-reading by bringing the reader's stand into the middle of the Jews.

Why does the Torah-reader face "out" (i.e., toward the congregants) while the Sheliaḥ Tzibbur (representative of the community for prayer, such as the Hazzan) face away from the congregants (i.e., in the same direction most of them face)? Consider, in each case, the source of the words being recited, and the "hearer."

Many Conservative synagogues are not set-up as described in the Shulḥan Aruch. What are some possible reasons to have the rabbi and cantor face the congregation? Do those leading a service today help lead the congregants as well as serving as a "representative"?

Sheliaḥ Tzibbur: Literally, the Congregation's Messenger—he who is responsible for inducing prayer-with-kavvanah (intent, uplift, concentration, intensity), making it a unit (ThePrayerOfTheCongregation), and placing it in presentable form before the Holy One, Blessed Be He, the Kadosh Baruch Hu.

“Ḥazzan” in Talmudic times referred more to what would be a Shamash today, a person who takes care of certain synagogue affairs. The ḥazzan's work, I imagine, also included some of the things now done by the “custodial staff.”

“Cantor”—from the Latin *canto, cantare*, “to sing” implies merely a singer.

The Talmud and Shulhan Aruch provide rules for selecting who is worthy of serving as a Sheliaḥ Tzibbur and how he must prepare himself for this immense responsibility of making hundreds of individual prayers into a PrayerOfTheCongregation.

the Holy (Ark): An Aron is simply a box, chest, closet. What is put inside of it causes it to become holy.

An Aron is also a coffin. (Coffins, according to Halachah, should be simply a box.) From the time the Jews left Egypt until they entered Aretz, they carried with them two Aronot: one contained the Tablets of the 10 Commandments (and the broken pieces of the first Tablets), and the other contained the bones of Joseph. On his deathbed, Joseph had made his children swear that they would take his bones out of Egypt for reburial in Israel. According to the Midrash, Moses was taken by Asher's daughter, Serach, to Joseph's body, which had been sunk in the Nile in an iron Aron—caused it to rise and float, and then transferred it to a wooden box for the pilgrimage to Israel.

Metaphorically speaking, carrying the bones of our ancestors to Israel when we go on a pilgrimage or make Aliyah is of great spiritual importance.

the elders: Elders, זקנים, in Talmudic parlance, does not refer exclusively to people who are chronologically old. The term may include people whose wisdom and knowledge is such that they are insightful and seasoned guides in the ways of Torah as it relates to the members of the community. Indeed, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah was only 18 years old when he was appointed leader of his Yeshiva-Academy.

Where there are, sadly, no elders in a particular community, should their chairs be left vacant, until the congregation produces one of its own or brings one from another locale?

the elders: A certain test of the values of a society is the society's terminology for those functioning within its structure. We have discovered that there were people called Rav, Sheliaḥ Tzibbur, Ḥazzan, and Zaken in the Talmudic Bet Kneset. There is apparently no Talmudic term for “usher.”

[n.b.: The Talmud states (Berachot 31a), “When Rabbi Akiva would pray for himself, (i.e., when he was not acting as Sheliaḥ Tzibbur), he would begin in one corner, and by the end of the Tefillot he would be found in another corner.”

The freedom of movement many desire in a synagogue is best afforded where there are no permanent seats. In the Vizhnitzer Chassidishe Shtiebl in Meah Shearim, one may fully participate in this aspect of prayer-body dynamics. People are wandering everywhere, hands and feet are in motion, and at moments the hands join for a dance. During Lecha Dodi they form a circle and sing their melodies and circle the reader's-stand, a wedding dance, since Shabbat is a Bride, worthy of being greeted in wedding-celebration fashion.

What does the metaphor mean, and what value is there to “carrying the bones” in this sense?

Various homiletical interpretations of the word זקנים (Elders) are given in the Talmud (Kiddushin 32 b). Consider these two:

The word “elder” really means “wise one.” אין זקן אלא חכם.

And making a play on the words זקנה (this one) שקנה (who acquired) Rabbi Yose Hagalili said, “Zaken (Elder) is one who acquired wisdom.”

ר' יוסי הגלילי אומר אין זקן אלא מי שקנה חכמה.
Freedom of movement, serves an important function in prayer. Can there be other purposes served by “decorum”? Under which circumstances is learning or teaching during Tefillot more easily achieved? Are there times when study and prayer should be united? Are there times when they should remain separate? Can there be “fixed seats” while still allowing individual movement?

How do most Conservative congregations welcome the Shabbat Bride during the Lecha Dodi? Is this a good example of “movement within decorum”?

קנא דיני קדושת ביה וכו יב העיפים : כמ"

א א בתי כנסיות ובתי מדרשות * אין נוהגין בהם א קלות (6) ראש כנון שחוק והתול ושיחה בשילה ואין אוכלין ושותים בהם ולא שתקשטין בהם ולא משיילין בהם ולא נכנסים בהם . תמה מפני התמה ובגשמים מפני הגשמים נ ות"ח ותלמידיהם מותרים לאכול ולשתות(א) בהם ב (3) מרחק : (ויש דננים ספרדז אלפי' עלה מרחק שרי) : (ר' פרק בני העיר) ג ואין מחשבין בהם חשבונות ד אלא אם כן הם של מצוה כנון קופה של צדקה ופדיון שבויים ה ואין מספירין בהם אלא אם כן יהיה ההספר ג לאחד (3) מגדולי העיר שכל בני העיר מתקבצים ובאים להספידו ואם צריך ליכנס בהם לערכו כנון לקרא לאדם יכנס ויקרא מעט * או יאמר דבר (ד) שמועה ואח"כ יקראנו כדי שלא יהא נראה כאלו נכנס לערכו ואם אינו יודע לא לקרות ולא לשנות יאמר לא' מדהינות קרא לי פסוק שאתה קורא בו או ישרה מעט ואח"כ יצא שהישיבה בהם מצוה שנאמר אשרי יושבי ביתך (וישיר הישיבה כרי הלך שני פתחים) (לדעת הר"מ כמ"י כ' ס"ס כ' (מרחקי ר"פ בעומקין) :

151 : 1 The Laws Concerning the Holiness of the Beit Kneset

151 : 1 In Batay Kneset and Batay Midrash one does not goof off, such as laugh, kid around, or engage in zero-conversation. One does not eat or drink in these [buildings], nor get dressed up super-fancy, nor stroll around, nor may one come inside on hot days because of the heat or on rainy days because of the rain. Talmiday Hachamim and their students may eat and drink in them if it is absolutely necessary. [Note: Some say (they may eat) in the Beit Midrash even if extraordinary circumstances do not prevail.] One does not conduct business in these buildings, except if they are matters of mitzvah-business, such as budgeting Tzedakah funds and redeeming captives. Eulogies are not to be recited there, except if the eulogy is for one of the important members of the community for which purpose the entire community comes to pay respects. If, however, one must enter these buildings for purely personal reasons, as for example, to locate someone, he should study a little or recite some text and read it over, so that it will not appear that he has entered simply for his own benefit. And if he does not know how to study Tanach [Bible] or Mishna, he should say to one of the children there, "Read me the verse you are studying,"—or he should simply stay a while and then leave, for the very act of sitting in these buildings is a Mitzvah, as it is written, "Happy are they who sit in Your house. . . ." (Psalms 84 : 5)

goof off: That is, senseless, meaningless goofing off. However, goofing off and playing around can be made Kadosh-holy in many situations: on Purim, on Simhat Torah, and for the Mitzvah of bringing joy to a bride and groom.

Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzhak would dance around while simultaneously juggling 3 myrtle branches—for the sake of making the bride happy. Despite the doubts and grumpiness of some of Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzhak's colleagues, the Talmud records divine approval of this seemingly childish behavior. (Ketubot 17a)

It once happened that 60 of the Ma'alot children were spending a week at a resort as the guests of the City of Ashkelon. A group of 4 or 5 Yeshiva boys came down from Jerusalem expressly for the purpose of singing and playing music for them, and goofing off with funny faces and jokes and imitations of Americans-in-Israel — in order to make them laugh and forget, at least for a moment, the memories of the massacre. This is a clear example of goofing off LeShaym Shamayim, for the Sake of Heaven.

We should perhaps introduce into our Hebrew School and Day School curricula a course in Goofing Off LeShaym Shamayim. Sacred Clowning is by no means an easy art to master.

Batay Kneset, recall, is the plural of Beit Kneset. Batay Midrash (singular: Beit Midrash) means "Houses of Learning," schools.

Does the end of this paragraph seem to indicate that knowledge will be gained by osmosis, just by being in the building for a while one will gain some wisdom? Does the law deal with gaining knowledge or the way to treat the building? Is the building structure important in and of itself, or because of what goes on inside? (Come back to this question after studying paragraph 151 : 10.)

zero-conversation: The Hebrew is שיחה בטלה, Siḥah Betaylah. The root בטל carries the meaning of worthless, something which has no value in the wide spectrum of Menschlichkeit. Siḥah Betaylah means words that are no more than air and vocal cords and speech rhythms, signifying nothing, contributing nothing towards Tikkun Olam—the repairing of the world, and the molding of Menschen. Torah-words can be reduced to Siḥah Betaylah if uttered with the utmost wrong, vicious, or careless intent, and, conversely, even an Ouch or Oy or grunt, partial words, more sounds than syllables, can be woven into speech as eloquent as the finest poetry.

A classic example of speech-adulteration is the latterday beer jingle that goes something like this: "When you say 'Bud,' you've said a lot of things nobody else can say. . . . When you say 'Budweiser,' you've said it all."

super-fancy: "Dressed-up" is sufficient.

stroll around: The Shulḥan Aruch is saying that a building wherein people walk around aimlessly is apparently a building offering no significance to people's lives.

the heat: The Talmud (Keutbot 112a-b) records a curious story:

Rabbi Ammi and Rabbi Assi [while in Aretz] would get up out of the sun into the shade [on cool days] and would go from the shade to the sun [on hot days].

Rashi remarks, "So they wouldn't kvetch about living in Aretz."

That meaning is: they themselves, and others like them, should not think that they were in Israel just for a vacation or for personal comfort, but rather, they were there because it was a Mitzvah to live in Eretz Yisrael.

Similarly with the synagogue—to use a holy building such as a synagogue merely as a protection from the weather would be a watering-down of its reason for existence, and, therefore, a desecration of its sanctity.

Talmiday Ḥachamin תלמידי חכמים: Sages who are still students. The Talmid Ḥacham always considered himself a student.

If they will have to go home every time they have to eat and drink, their studies will be seriously interrupted. Therefore, if the Beit Kneset is not used for study, they may not eat there. (Magen Avraham)

eat and drink: In another section of the Shulḥan Aruch [Orah Hayyim 269], which discusses the laws of Shabbat, provision is made under certain conditions, for eating in the Beit Kneset:

It is the custom to make Kiddush in the Beit Kneset. The one who recites Kiddush should not taste the Kiddush wine, but rather should give it to a child to taste, since Kiddush should be recited only where there is a meal, and originally [this practice of reciting Kiddush in the Beit Kneset] was instituted for the way-faring guests who are eating there, [the recitation thereby] allowing them to fulfill their obligation for Kiddush. Nowadays, even though passers-through do not eat in the Beit Kneset, the practice [of reciting Kiddush] has not been abandoned, which is the reason why there are still places that make Kiddush in the Beit Kneset. However, it is better not to make Kiddush in the Beit Kneset, and thus is the custom of Eretz Yisrael.

What is wrong with getting dressed up to go to the Beit Kneset; isn't that a sign of respect? The Hebrew word being considered is מתקשטין (preen) coming from a root קשט which means "to ornament". What is the real prohibition here?

Can there be a permissible "secular" use to "holy" building? The synagogue is known as a "House of Study" (בית מדרש), a "House of Prayer" (בית תפילה) and a "House of Gathering" (בית כנסת). Is it not possible that the structure might serve important communal/social functions that are permitted? Should a synagogue be used to house people in cases of emergency, such as flooding?

Despite the fact that in the time of Rav Yosef Karo (16th Century, Tzefat) travelers were no longer fed and lodged in the Beit Knesset, we see that it was an ancient and well-established custom. This might well be revived in our day, particularly for the benefit of the traveling hitchhikers and modified Jewish jet-setters. During the peak vacation and summer seasons, they would be encouraged to travel "Jewishly" if they were aware of the facilities at their disposal for Shabbat meals in a Shabbat environment. Often enough, individual members of congregations around the country are willing to provide hospitality for such travelers, and the men and women "on the road" should make it a habit of contacting the Jews of the next town on their itinerary before they arrive. Perhaps a catalogue of willing Batay Knesset and Jews around the country should be published called, "Resting Your Soles and Souls—A Hachnasat Orḥim Guide to North America."

The Magen Avraham indicates that the meal is served "in the building adjoining the synagogue" which, nowadays, is comparable to any one of the rooms in the same building with the sanctuary.

The Ba'er Hetev notes that a prominent Rabbi, the Maharil, made it his practice to purchase the wine for Kiddush and Havdalah for his Beit Knesset. He also mentions that it is permissible to feed children during Shaḥarit, before Kiddush, since it is best not to make the experience in synagogue difficult for children.

conduct business: Finances and budgets *per se* are not looked down upon. The Talmud and Shulḥan Aruch merely differentiate between affairs which are Mitzvah-oriented, and those which are purely secular. Thus, Mitzvah-money may be discussed within the precincts of the Beit Knesset, and, indeed, they may be spoken of on the Shabbat.

During the past 10 years, we have availed ourselves of this kind of discussion in the matter of Soviet Jews, which is a classic case of פְּדִירוֹן שְׁבוּיִים, the Mitzvah of redeeming captives. It is to our credit that much of the protest-work has been carried out through the agency of the Beit Knesset.

important members: That is to say, for the relative of one of the prominent members has passed away, as in the case of Rifram who eulogized his daughter-in-law in the synagogue. (Magen Avraham; Megillah 28b)

The Talmud (Moed Katan 21b) illustrates how the great man ought to conduct himself on such occasions:

When the sons of Rabbi Akiva died, all Israel came [into the synagogue] and eulogized them, reciting very great eulogies. As they were about to leave, Rabbi Akiva stood on a high bench and said, "Our brothers, the House of Israel, listen. . . . I have been comforted, because of the honor you have done. If you have done this for Akiva, see how many Akiva's there are in the street. Rather, you have said, 'God's Torah is in his heart' [Psalms 37:31], and therefore, [since you have honored the Torah], your reward is doubled. Return to your homes in peace."

Akiva, as others in the time of the Talmud, clearly recognized that they were everyday-people, and if they were to be considered in any way men of distinction, it would be because of the Torah they had learned and taught. Therefore, the real honor, as Akiva states, belongs to the Torah.

one should study: Every contact with the synagogue should involve some basic minimum of Torah-study, so that there will be a meaning to one's coming within its walls.

Would a brief D'var Torah at the beginning of a USY chapter meeting be fulfilling this obligation?

to one of the children: The Shulḥan Aruch clearly recognizes that one should feel no shame or embarrassment when asking someone well his junior, even the youngest child, to teach him some Torah. Akiva himself was not embarrassed to begin studying Torah at 40.

the very act of sitting in these buildings is a Mitzvah: The primary purpose of taking the USYers to Russia and Eastern Europe is not to smuggle in Siddurim and Magen-David's, but to be a *presence*, a living vital contact for the Soviet Jews with Jews free to live and Mitzvah-act Jewish. It is important to *be there* with the Jews, whether you are praying or not.

One cannot avoid being effected while sitting in a Beit Knesset or a Beit Midrash: people are praying, people are studying Torah. Somewhere in the things going on, beyond the sources of the disenchanted Jew's disgruntlement, is a hint of the mystery of the meaning of being a part of the Jewish people.

151 : 3 One may not sleep in a Beit Knesset, not even a short nap, though this is permitted in a Beit Midrash.

sleep: One is required to scold those who sleep in the synagogue, and so much the more those who sleep during the sermon. . . . One does not respond. "Gezundheit" to someone who has sneezed while in the synagogue. (Ba'er Hetev)

This sub-paragraph cannot be studied by itself. It receives more explanation and elucidation in section 151 : 4. This interweaving is typical of most Jewish legal texts, and therefore it is not always conclusive to bring one isolated statement as "proof" for a particular point of view. There are often statements which refine and modify — or even countermand! — a given statement that seems, on first glance, quite simple.

Does this reference to Beit Knesset apply to the entire synagogue structure, or just to the "Sanctuary" portion of the building? This question should be considered throughout the discussion, since our present day buildings often combine a sanctuary, social hall, and school wing.

ד ם לצורך ביה מותר לאכול ד ולישן (י) בתוכו ומשעם זה ישנים בליל יום הכפורים בכיה
ומפילו לצורך מצוה אחרת כגון כשנקבצים ה לעבר (י) השנה בכיה כותר לאכול שם:

151 : 4 If some synagogue-necessity is involved, it is permitted to eat and sleep in the building. For this reason people sleep in the synagogue on the night of Yom Kippur. . . . And even if it is necessary for some other Mitzvah. . . . it is permitted to eat there.

some other Mitzvah: He [the Shulhan Aruch] means to say, 'Excluding a Mitzvah-meal where there will be drunkenness'—which is forbidden even in a Beit Midrash. In any event, those who rule leniently about making a meal for a Siyyum in the Beit Midrash because there is no other place affording such space—one should not restrain them [from having a Siyyum-meal there]. (Mishna Berura)

A Siyyum is a ceremony whereby a person formally concludes the study of a Masechet (Large Section, Tractate) of the Talmud. The one who is celebrating invites his friends, rebbis, and students to hear him teach the closing portion of the Masechet. A special Kaddish is then recited, and a Mitzvah-meal follows, often accompanied by singing and dancing. Siyyumim were and are joyous events wherein the community shares the Simha of the Talmud student who has completed a sizable chunk of the Talmud. Together they wish him well, and encourage him to return to that Masechet and complete it again.

Apparently, from the Mishna Berura's remarks, Siyyumim were extraordinarily well attended, and because the focal point of the Simha was Torah, it was assumed that people would not get carried away with their drinking, but would combine Torah and Simha in a manner befitting Menschlich Jews.

There is a classical Midrash about drinking and drunkenness. It speaks of Noah, who planted the first vineyard [Tanḥuma, Noah, 13]:

When Noah was about to plant the vineyard, Satan [the Evil Inclination personified] appeared and stood before him. He said, "What are you planting?"

He answered, "A Vineyard."

He asked, "What is it like?"

He answered, "Its fruit is sweet, whether moist or dry, and wine, which makes hearts joyous, is made from it [As it is written (Psalms 104:15), 'Wine makes the heart of man joyous.']

Satan said to him, "Come, let us plant this vineyard together."

He said, "All right."

What did Satan do? He brought a lamb and slaughtered it at the base of the vine. Then he brought a lion and did the same, and then a pig, and finally a monkey. The blood dripped down and irrigated the vineyard.

Satan thereby indicated that before a man drinks wine, he is innocent as a lamb who knows nothing, and like a silent ewe waiting to be sheared. If he drinks properly, he becomes courageous like a lion and says there is none like him in the entire world. Once he drinks too much, he becomes like a pig, making himself filthy in his own urine and excrement. When he becomes completely soused, he becomes like a monkey, dancing and playing around, uttering obscenities and having no sense of what he is doing.

Which is exactly what happened to Noah.

Lion-like Simḥa is what the Shulḥan Aruch allows in its ruling.

What are other examples of "lion-like Simḥa"? This Midrash is based upon the idea of moderation. Do note while extreme drinking is forbidden, abstinence (or celibacy) is not considered a desired state in Judaism.

ה' הוּוּ לְבִידָה שְׁנֵי פִתְחוֹת לֹא יִכְנַס בְּפִתְחוֹת זֶה לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ
דְּרֹךְ לְצֵאתָ בְּפִתְחוֹת הַשְּׁנַיִם וְלִקְצֹר דְּרֹכָו וְאִם הָיָה הַדְּרֹךְ
עֹבֵר קֹדֶם שְׁנֵי פִתְחוֹת כִּי כֹתֵר וְכֵן אִם לֹא נִכְנַס בּוֹ תַחֲלָה
כִּדְרֵי לִקְצֹר דְּרֹכָו מִתּוֹת לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ דְּרֹךְ וְכַשֵּׁנְכֵם בּוֹ הַתַּפְּלָל
ז' (פ) מִתּוֹת לְמִי שְׁנֵי פִתְחוֹת זֶה לְצֵאתָ בְּפִתְחוֹת אַחֵר:

151:5 If a synagogue has two doors, one may not go in one to make it a shortcut to get to and out the other door. . . .

shortcut: Similar to the ruling in 151:1, we are told not to abuse our synagogues by using them for anything other than purposes that are related to Kedushah-holiness. Nowadays, there are people who enjoy picnicking in cemeteries (some of them are indeed so lovely and lavishly landscaped as to make it a fine spot to nosh—were it not for the graves), and while this ruling is not as stark as picnics-and-cemeteries, it is a reminder that a division between Kodesh (holy) and Ḥol (secular) must be preserved in our everyday lives.

The Havdalah prayer is an excellent opportunity for the Jew to establish this theme during the forthcoming week. It reminds him that he must be fastidious and skillful in the art of differentiating:

Praised be You, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, Who differentiates between holy and secular, light and darkness, Israel and non-Jews, and between the 7th day and the 6 workdays.

As He has set up these divisions in time, space, peoples, and natural phenomena, so, too, we are asked to clarify in our own lives the divisions between the significant and the inconsequential, the sublime and the incredibly diddy, the Menschlich and the adulterated ways of living.

Maimonides, mentioned in the Be'ur Halachah, states it simply, and forcefully: It is forbidden to enter them [synagogues] except for Mitzvah-purposes.

Do you feel there should be a division between holy and secular, or that we should try to invest our secular activities with as much "holiness" as possible? Can the holy be appreciated without the secular? Can we understand good in absolute terms, or only at it relates to evil?

Metaphorically speaking, it would be wise to ask what is the nature and purpose of the "Shortcuts" we have technologized into our lives. The problem is critical in the area of old age: people are free, after a certain number of years, to "retire." Too often this means a vacant era of golf, longlong walks, and cardgames. Boredom and ennui. Or worse, the "convalescent home." Without the sense of depth and value, the end-years of so many lives are spent fighting off the Angel while yawning with emptiness.

One need only spend 5 minutes at Yad LaKashish (Life Line for the Old) in Jerusalem, to see the work of Mrs. Miriam Mendelow. In a series of workshops employing well over 100 elderly people, she has proven that being old is a source of dignity, pride, and enthusiasm. Yad is located at 12 Shivtai Yisrael St., phone 287-829. Go, watch, be watched. The rest, as Hillel would have said it, is commentary.

What is "the Angel"?
[The reference is to the Angel of Death, the (symbolic) representation of death.]

ו' ימותר ליכנס בב'ה במקלו ובתרמילו ה ובאפורתו
(פ' מיי יוסים מרגום ונילקום ונבדחיו) כ' ויש אפרים ליכנס
כו (ב) במכני ארנה או א' בראש כנולה :

151:6 There are those who forbid entering a Beit Kneset with a long knife. . . .

knife: Prayer lengthens man's days, and the knife makes them shorter. . . . And the Shulhan Aruch mentions [Orah Hayyim 180:5], "It is customary to cover the knives when it is time to say the Birkat HaMazon. . . ." [Taz]

The long knife is blatantly contradictory to the spirit of the synagogue. It should be removed before entering. A short knife, necessary for those who have to eat there (in those days), could, however, be covered in a sheath of some sort.

Unfortunately, some synagogues have to employ armed guards for the High Holidays.

Concerning covering the knives after a meal—

There are two reasons. One, that iron shorten's man's life, and it is not proper to have it on the Table, which is like an altar, which lengthen's man's life. The other reason, which is quoted in the name of Rabbeynu Simha is, "Once a man who was saying Birkat HaMazon came to the blessing about rebuilding Jerusalem [כונה ירושלים], and, recalling the destruction of the Temple, stabbed himself in the stomach with his knife." (Mishna Berura, quoting the Bet Yosef)

A woman who was raised in Freiberg, Germany, explained to me that in their household they used to cut the meat in the kitchen and bring it to the table already cut into bite-sized pieces, thus eliminating the need altogether for knives at the table.

(How) does prayer lengthen one's days?

Do you think covering or removing knives from the table is "over-doing it," or that there is value in such symbolism? Are there other ways to show the same concerns? Do acts of this nature make sense when viewed as distinct actions, or do the many symbolic acts gain in meaning by being part of an overall system in which we show values through concrete activities.

ח מ טיש שעל רגליו ראוי לקנחו קודם שיכנס להתפלל
וראוי שלא יהא עליו ולא על בגדיו שום ככלוך:

151 : 8 It is considered proper to clean the mud off one's feet before coming in to pray. It is undesirable for one to enter when one's body or clothes are dirty.

body or clothes are dirty: The following is a selection from the Talmud of statements concerning clothes and personal cleanliness—

A man should wash his face, hands, and feet each day for the sake of his Creator. (Shabbat 50b)

“Let all that you do be for the sake of Heaven”—like Hillel.

When Hillel would go someplace, they would ask, “Where are you going, Hillel?”

“I am going to do a Mitzvah.”

“Which Mitzvah, Hillel?”

“I am going to the baths.”

“Is this a Mitzvah?”

He said, “Yes, to keep my body clean. Consider the fact that the man who scrubs and washes the statues [which were images of the Caesars] in palaces makes an excellent salary. And not only that, he is considered a man of great importance. We—who are created in God's image—ought we not be meticulous about ourselves?” (Avot D'Rabbi Natan, B, 30 [A similar account is related in another Midrash wherein Hillel explains that elementary care of the gastrointestinal tract is also a Mitzvah.])

A man's clothes are his honor. (Shemot Rabbah 18:5)

Rabbi Yoḥanan used to call his clothes, My Honorers.” (Shabbat 113b)

Your Shabbat clothes should not be the same as your weekday clothes. (Shabbat 113a)

Three things ease a man's mind: a pleasant place to live, a pleasant wife, and pleasant clothes. (Berachot 57b)

Rabbi Yosi the son of Rabbi Ḥanina said, “He who mistreats his clothes will eventually find no pleasure in them. (Berachot 62b)

Three people's lives cannot be considered “living” . . . and there are those that include, Even one who owns only one set of clothes. Betzah 32b)

One should always eat and drink less than his means allow, dress himself according to his means, and honor his wife and children beyond his means. (Hulin 84b)

Does this law embody the principle of “clothes make the man”? Can you reconcile the apparent contradiction between this paragraph and 151:1?

Study the talmudic statements about the importance of one's clothing. Do they contradict what you would have assumed to be the normal Jewish view on the subject? Do these statements refer to one's clothing only when going to the synagogue, when involved in some “religious” activity, or in general?

ט : נוהגים בהם כבוד י (י) לכבדן ולרבען [פי' כבוד יקוי
כנים. רינגן זיקה ממים על פני הקרקע] ט ונודעין להדליק
בהם נרות לכבדן :

151:9 The customary way of honoring the [synagogues] is by sweeping and mopping the floors.

sweeping and mopping: It would be worthwhile to give the synagogue's janitors an extra day's vacation every so often in order to allow the congregation members the honor of cleaning the building.

The Shulhan Aruch indicates in this passage that a substantial part of many Mitzvot is laborious, or what might be called colloquially "grunge-work." While the higher implications and meanings of Mitzvot often soar to the heart of Heaven, up to the very Throne of Glory, what is often involved is shlepping, scrubbing, schvitzing, and similar activities. For example:

1. The day-after-day grind of צער גידול בנים -Tza'ar Giddul Banim, the pain and pain-in-the-neck of raising children for a life of Mitzvot. Like shlepping the "kids" back and forth to Hebrew School.

Like shlepping the "kids" back and forth to Hebrew High School.

Like shlepping the "kids" back and forth to Day School.

2. Driving back and forth to the hospital to fulfill the Mitzvah of ביקור חולים Bikkur Cholim, visiting the sick.

3. Standing in the rain for an hour at a funeral.

4. Cooking Thursday night late-nights to prepare a fine meal for Shabbat guests.

5. Rising at 4:30 a.m. day in and day out to plow, sow, and reap the crops of Eretz Yisrael.

6. Retying the unraveled Tzitzit on the synagogue's talaytim.

7. Repairing the Siddurim at the synagogue.

8. Running errands for elderly, alone Jews on the Lower East Side. (Contact Project Ezra in New York)

The second portion of the paragraph states that another way to honor the synagogue is to light candles in them. What is the relationship of these two forms of honor?

י "אפי' יא (°) דאחר (b) שחרבו עדיין הם בקרושתן
* וכשם שנוהגים בהם כבוד בישובן כך נוהגים
בחרבנם הוי' מכבוד ורבוץ ואם עלו בהם עשבים תולשים
אותם ומניחים במקומן משום ענמת נפש כדי שיראו העם
ותעיד רוחם (ג) וישתדלו לבנותה :

151:10 Even after Batay Knesset have been destroyed, they retain their Kedushah-holiness, and just as they were treated with respect when they were occupied, so, too, must they be treated with respect in their destroyed state, except for sweeping and mopping. If weeds have begun to grow, one must uproot them and leave them where they grew, because of the soul-sadness of it all—that people should see [the weeds] and be stirred to rebuild it.

retain their kedushah-holiness: So great is the power of man to make seemingly neutral objects holy (bricks, stone, wood), that even after they have been ruined, they retain their quality of holiness.

Touring through Europe, particularly Eastern Europe, should include a thorough itinerary of synagogue visits. Some still flourish, though not as they did before the Shoah; others are museums, some are desolate, the silence of the ruins tearing the heart. The overwhelming number simply do not exist anywhere—burned and turned to ash, carried away in the wind, the land plowed over for streets or parks. What began with Kristallnacht ["the Night of the Broken Glass"], April 9-10, 1938, when 191 synagogues were set on fire and another 76 completely destroyed, ended with the statistics approaching numbers that, because they are so high, drain the reality of its incredible horror. One need only see the wall

adjacent to the Ramo Synagogue in Cracow, built of fragments of Jewish gravestones, to begin to ask the Questions. Or to sit in the seats of the last synagogue in Warsaw. Or to ask survivors, "Does your synagogue, the one from your childhood, still stand?"

When the European Pilgrimage began visiting the Soviet Union, there were 3 synagogues in Moscow for 500,000 Jews. In 1972, there were only 2, and it is said that one remains now, the one on Arkhipova Street, where the Simḥat Torah dancing mentioned in *The Jews of Silence* took place.

There is one synagogue in Leningrad, for 300,000 Jews.

In the broad historical-sociological study of American Judaism, the serious student must also take into account the many synagogue-buildings left behind as the Jews moved to the suburbs. The old synagogue where Al Jolson's father was ḥazzan—what has happened to it? Where is it among the Washington slums? How many synagogues in Manhattan still stand, abandoned, condemned, remnants of "those days"? Their books—the Siddurim, Ḥumashim, Talmudim—and their Jews, where are they?

treated with respect: All items that have been instilled with kedushah, or are by nature kadosh, must be treated respectfully, even when they have ceased to function. Sifray Torah and old books are buried in a Genizah, as is well known. The halachah provides in each case for the specific use-after-usefulness is fulfilled, and it would do well to examine the passages dealing with Sukkahs after Sukkot, old Tfillin, old Talaytim, Lulav and Etrog, the Parochet-curtain covering the ark. May an old Parochet be made into a Tfillin-bag? Is the cloth-part of a Tallit, the נגד , to be treated the same as the Tzitzit? Is a Menorah considered holy? A Ner Tamid? These are relevant questions that ought to be researched, so that we do not intrude or trample on this unique quality of Jewish life—Kedushah.

It once happened that a group of Jewish students at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania discovered a 200-year-old Talmud in the rare book room of the library. They sat around, in a group, leafing through its pages, and discovered old Tzitzit used as bookmarks, notes to a sermon, a handwritten Hebrew calendar. What might have remained a museum-piece for the school, became, as a result of their efforts, a serious, moving reality.

Consider, again, the question raised in conjunction with 151:1 — is the building structure important in and of itself, or because of what goes on inside?

Is the effort required to taking care of the destroyed building better spent in trying build a new structure?

How does this law relate to synagogues which are "abandoned" as a result of the changing demography of the city-center, and the exodus of the Jewish community to the suburbs.

When considering what may be made into something else, each case has its own particular laws to be studied. However, the general principle is מעלין בקודש ואין מורידין בו , "increase the level of holiness, do not decrease it." (This, by the way, is the rationale for increasing the number of candles we light on Hanukah each night, rather than starting with eight and decreasing the number by one each night.)

קנב שלא לסתור שום בית הכנסת. וכו' סעיף אחר :
 א * ח * אין סותרין (ט) בית הכנסת כדי לבנות בהיכן
 אחר א (א) שמא יארע להם אונס שלא יבנו האחר
אלא בונים אחר תחלה ב ואחר כך (ג) סותרים הישן
(ואם לא דעו לספור רק תחלה ח' להחזיקו בני ג (ג) דינא סבי רינע
יחזקת ל"ג ח"ס וכלי נגס רענ"ס) ב ודגני מילי שהיה ראשון חזק
(ב) אבל אם הרבו יסודותיו או נפצו כתליו ליפול סותרים
אותו מיד ג ומתחילין לבנות ד במדרה ביום ובלילה
שםא תרחק השעיה וישאר חרוכ :
 בנס (ג) ה' וספור ליקח אנשים מבי' (ד) טעמם כדי לבנות מחדש. (כ"ט
 ט' ל"ט) (ד) ו' וספור (ט) לספור דבר עני'ם אלל אלס ק טעמם
 טל מנח לבנות : (מדכתי ט' בני ספיר) :

152: Not to Tear Down Any Beit Knesset

152:1 A Beit Knesset may not be torn down in order to build another, because it may happen that, due to circumstances beyond their control, they will not succeed in building the other one. Therefore, the other one should be built first, and then the old one may be torn down. . . . This applies in the case where the first one was strong, but if its foundations have rotted or its walls are caving in, it must be taken down immediately, and rebuilding must begin right away, swiftly, working day and night, to prevent time and circumstance from causing insurmountable difficulties. . . . thus leaving the building in a state of ruin. [Note: And it is forbidden to take stones from the old Beit Knesset to build into the new one---]

in order to build another: There is no need to mention if they were considering tearing this one down and not rebuilding—which is, of course, forbidden—but even if they are tearing it down in order to build another in the same place or another place, it is forbidden—even if they are planning to build right away a greater, more magnificent structure. (Mishna Berura)

beyond their control: Even if all the funds were raised and the stones and boards and other materials were on hand—even then it is forbidden, in the event that something will happen, such as the need to give money for redeeming captives. (Mishna Berura, from Talmudic source)

the old one: A synagogue which has fallen into ruin and cannot be rebuilt in the same place. . . . it is permitted to build any building upon the land, and it is good to make it into a vegetable garden. (Ateret Zekaynim)

[Note. . . . take stones from the old Beit Knesset]: This applies to the beginning of the paragraph, where the synagogue is in good condition, and the situation is such that they have already begun the new building, and they want to take down the old one in order to complete the new one—and they are in short supply of stones to complete the new building. The Note informs us that even in a situation such as this, where the tearing down of one is for the sake of building the other—even in such a case, we are concerned that circumstances will prevent its completion, and it is therefore forbidden, if the congregation has another place to pray in the meantime. (Mishna Berura)

What is the reasoning behind the law which permits/requires taking down the synagogue with weak foundations even before the new one is built.

How can we know that the Note (the statement of Rama, Isserles) applies to the beginning of the paragraph? Try to apply the Note to the beginning, to the middle, and to the end, following through the logical implications in each instance.

קנג ריני בנין בית הכנסת. וכוונ סעיפים :
א א ° מותר לעשות מביה (ה) בית המדרש אבל לא
מבית המדרש (ז) ביה :

153: The Laws of Building a Beit Knesset

153:1 It is permitted to make a Beit Knesset into a Beit Midrash [House of Study], but a Beit Midrash may not be made into a Beit Knesset.

Beit Midrash: This is a place set aside specifically for Torah-study, as its holiness is greater. . . . even if they will do no praying there [in the Beit Midrash]. (Mishna Berura)

Beit Knesset: This refers specifically to a Beit Knesset where there has not been set aside Midrash to study, but our Batay Knesset, where they set aside Midrash to study for an hour—they are to be considered like a Beit Midrash, and it is permissible to make that Beit Midrash into a Beit Knesset. (Ba'er Hetev quoting Responsum of Dvar Shmuel)

The Shulhan Aruch, basing its decision on the Talmud, is indicating in this passage, the value-relationship of study and prayer. Apparently, Torah-study takes precedence over prayer. This may not be true in all situations, however, and the traditional way to investigate the interrelationship of the two concepts is to see other passages in the Talmud and halachic literature where they are mentioned together, and to carefully consider the implications of all decisions and discussions.

Nowadays, synagogues building new buildings in the suburbs often build the classrooms first, leaving the sanctuary for later. This practice reflects the meaning of this passage, particularly stressing the supreme importance of elementary education. A passage from the Talmud (Shabbat 119b) states it most eloquently:

The world exists for the sake of the breath of children studying Torah.

Note that this law too, is based upon the principle pointed out in the notes to paragraph 152:1, on the phrase "treated with respect."

Which would you consider of a higher degree of holiness, the Beit Knesset or Beit Midrash?

Consider the validity of the quotation from the Talmud (Shabbat 119 b).

ו ז מוכרים ביה וכן שאר דברים שבקדושה ואפילו ספר
תורה (ד) להספקת (ט) תלמידים או ט ° להשיא
(י) יתומים א [ברמיו] :

153:6 It is permitted to sell a Beit Knesset, and, similarly, all holy objects — even a Sefer Torah — in order to provide for Torah-students or to marry off orphans.

sell a Beit Knesset: This statement applies only if there is another Beit Knesset [at the disposal of the community.] (Taz)

even a Sefer Torah: This an open rebuke to those people who are lax in supporting Torah in their cities. (Mishna Berura)

The Mishna Berura is emphasizing the magnitude of the disgrace it would be to have to sell a Sefer Torah because people with sufficient means did not give enough to provide for the necessary Torah-education of the community.

A certain Jew in Toronto just passed away [a man who would, no doubt, have wished his name to remain unknown in writings such as these]: a wealthy man, an immigrant to Canada from "over there." It is said that there was a long list of yeshivot and shtiebelach that were sustained by him. If there was a deficit in one of these institutions, he simply wrote a check for the amount needed to keep them solvent. זכר צדיק לברכה — may the memory of a Tzaddik be a blessing.

Does this law also follow the principle of ascending in the amount of holiness rather than descending?

If you were preparing a commentary on the phrase "even a Sefer Torah" what point would you make? If it would be a commentary different from the Mishra Berura, what would the difference of approach show?

to provide for students: It once happened that Rabbi Ḥama bar Ḥanina and Rabbi Hoshaya were taking a tour of the synagogues of Lod. Rabbi Ḥama bar Ḥanina said to Rabbi Hoshayah, "How much money my forebears spent here!" [They had built a number of the synagogues in Lod.] He replied, "How many souls your forebears drowned here! Weren't there people here who wanted to study Torah?" [And who were prevented from doing so because of the lack of scholarship funds.] (Yerushalmi, Shekalim 5:4)

Rabbi Abun made the gates of a certain great Beit Midrash. When Rabbi Mana came to visit, he said, "See what I have done!" [Rabbi Mana] answered. " 'Israel forgot their Creator by building temples.' Were there no students around who wanted to study Torah?" (Yerushalmi Shekalim 5:4)

What is the point of two stories? Are they meant to discourage people from providing for the community's building needs?

marry off orphans: The same law applies, i.e., that of selling a Sefer Torah, in order to raise money for the release of captives. (Magen Avraham)

marry off orphans: The Mitzvah of Hachnasat Kallah, providing funds for a decent wedding for anyone who would not have the necessary money at their disposal, this Mitzvah is so great that Hachanasat Kallah Societies were established in towns and cities to guarantee such simchas for everyone. These societies exist today, and walking in the streets of Jerusalem, one occasionally sees signs showing where the office of the Hachnasat Kallah Society is. There are individuals around who have taken it upon themselves to make certain that poor and underprivileged couples get a decent wedding.

If you would like real insight into the workings of this Mitzvah, contact HaRabbanit Bracha Kapach, 12 Lod St., Jerusalem, phone 231-296. Her experiences over the past years are dazzling.

In a way of general summary of this passage, it is possible to see how the Shulḥan Aruch deals with priorities, financial preferences. The past few years have seen re-orientations among some Jewish fund-raising and distribution organizations in North America. Still, the questions arise, "Have the priorities been sufficiently reshuffled? How do the allocations for education compare with those for hospitals? Social services?"

As members of a Jewish community, the Shulḥan Aruch indicates that it is each Jew's responsibility to involve himself in the Mitzvahs covered by the organization—be it the local synagogue or the community-wide Federation. Budgets are open for examination. They should be examined, and reacted to, carefully, in a manner befitting a Jew of integrity, and with a broad sense of authentic Jewish values.

הגה יהודי שנתנה ב"ה והתנה לקבל דינה כב"ה של קהל אבל אם שיר לעמו
בה שום כח אין לה מער כי אם על פי הקהל ועל פיו או יורשו (א"י)
והנהגות אשכנזי"ם בני העיר) שכן וכל זה לא תיירי אלא כשיש להם ב"ה
אחרת אבל אם אין להם רק ב"ה אחת יז אסור למכרו דהא אפילו למסור
אסור עד שיבנו אחרת (רבי' ירושל' ג"כ ח"ה וכו' בשם הרמב"ן) כל דבר
שנקדשה שנמכר ונמסר לשנומו (ח) נתקדש יחד כלא הכרזה ים ואין בו
אונאה אבל דבר שאסור לשנומו כ (טו) לקדושה קלה אר"ך הכרזה (תשנ"ג)
הש"ס סי' תשנ"ד :

153:7 . . . [Note: If an individual built a Beit Kneset and gave it to the congregation, it is to be considered just like any other community synagogue. However, if he left some authority for himself, it may not be sold, except by the congregation in conjunction with that individual or his heirs. . . .]

gave it to the congregation: The generosity factor and its relationship to the power-structure of the modern synagogue is one of the more complex, well-known, and often, disheartening aspects of synagogue life in North America. This is by no means a problem in every community, but is prominent in enough locations to have soured many on synagogue life in general. Re-evaluation and discussion and alternatives are, perhaps, a pressing priority in these communities. Working within the value-system of traditional Judaism may well ameliorate the situation in many communities if due consideration is given to the values of Tzedakah, kedushah, and kavod.

What is the point of stating that the synagogue which was donated by an individual is to be treated like any other community synagogue?

ח נא ° ז בנו בית סתם והקדישו אח"כ לב"ה דינו כב"ה
אבל (ט) אינו קדוש (י) עד שיתפללו בו אפי' אם
בנאוהו לשם ב"ה וכיון שהתפללו בו אפי' אורחים לפי
שעה כיון שהיה מיוחד לתפלה קדוש מ' ואם לפי שעה
הקדישו הכל לפי מה שאמרו :

153:8 If a regular house was built, and then afterwards it was made kadosh as a Beit Kneset, it is considered a Beit Kneset. However, it is not kadosh until people have prayed in it. . . .

until people have prayed in it: The Shulhan Aruch reiterates the awesome power of human beings to make something Kadosh. The act of community prayer, in this case, is sufficient to turn wood and bricks and stones into a holy place.

A similar Halacha relates to Shabbat. While God sanctified the Shabbat, Man plays a critical role in its essential Kedushah—as is expressed in the following Halachah:

Rav Huna stated: If a man was walking in the desert and did not know when Shabbas was supposed to be, he counts off six days and keeps one as Shabbat. (Shabbat 69b)

153:9 This section and other passages of Hilchot Beit HaKneset are concerned with the rules of selling a synagogue: to whom it may be sold, what it may be subsequently used for, whether it is a small-town synagogue or a building in a large city that is to be sold. The material is complex, with great need on the part of the student for careful scrutinization of the commentaries.

The subject is too involved and lengthy to develop in a source book of this type. However, under your teacher's supervision, and with the participation of your local building committee and rabbi, a study and discussion of this material would be most worthwhile and insightful.

153:17 If a man had a Beit Kneset in his house for a long period of time, the congregation is not permitted to move it to another house.

to move it: For the sake of preserving peace, that it should not be said about this homeowner [in whose house they are conducting the services], "They're not good-enough people." (Mishna Berura)

to move it: But if only a portion of the congregation wants to split up and pray in another place, they are permitted, since some will still be praying [in the original house], and the mitzvan [in the first house] will not have been taken away thereby. (Mishna Berura)

The Mishna Berura extends the halachic principle to other areas where individuals or groups have established their involvement in the Mitzvah—

The same rule applies to other matters of honor (**כבוד**) or Mitzvah—we do not move the location—except if there is sufficient reason brought forth by those appealing for the move. And we are not necessarily speaking of matters of common frequency, but even in matters which take place only from time to time—the law is the same. The Aḥaronim [Later Halachists] have written that people who have an established claim in burying the dead may not prevent others from doing a burial, because in doing Mitzvot, everyone wants to have the privilege. However, in places where there is a Chevra Kadisha [Burial Society], whose job it is to do the burying, and who take time from their regular work the entire year when the need arises for burials, we are required to let the Chevra Kadisha do the burying, as is their custom.

Recommended reading for the problem of funerals in America:

1. "The Scandal of the Jewish Funeral" in Rabbi Samuel Dresner's *The Jew in American Life* (Crown Publishers, 1963).
2. *The American Way of Death*, by Jessica Mitford.

Can you offer other motivations for this law? Are there times when the community's ultimate best interests would not be served by following the ruling?

קנה לילך מביה לבית המדרש וכו' ב סעיפים :

א * מ אחר שיצא מבית הכנסת א ילך (ה) לבית המדרש
ויקבע עת ללמוד וצריך שאותו עת יהיה קבוע שלא
יעבירו אף אם הוא סבור להרויח הרבה : הגה ואף מי שאינו
יודע ללמוד ילך לבית המדרש ושכר הליכה בידו או יקבע לו מקום וילמוד
חשט כמה שיוודע ב' ויחשוב בעניניו ויכנס בלבו וילת שמים (הריי פ"ק
ד'ט"ח) :

155 Going from the Beit Kneset to the Beit Midrash

155:1 After leaving the Beit Kneset, one should go to the Beit Midrash, and should fix a time for Torah-study. That time should be so permanent that one should not pass it by, even if he believes he will make a great financial profit. [Note: Even if he does not know how to study, he should go to the Beit Midrash, and he receives the reward for merely going. Or he should set aside a place and study a little of what he can master, and should consider his condition, and a spirit of the Awe of Heaven will thereby enter him.]

After leaving: The Shulhan Aruch and the Notes of Rabbi Moshe Isserles are abundantly clear. However, the commentaries elucidate considerably, and add supplemental elements to the subject at hand. The following is a selection from the commentaries:

After leaving the Beit Kneset: The Ateret Zekaynim records a prayer which is appropriate for recitation before studying, a portion of which is as follows—

"May it be your will, O God. . . . to instruct the angels appointed over the Torah, that they teach me your Torah. And may my heart be open like the door to a great hall to grasp your Torah. And may the words of your Torah rest in my mouth like a ready-set table [**שולחן ערוך**] and like an everflowing stream, and may the words of Your Torah be well-kept in my heart, that I not forget them. And may I be like a cemented cistern that never loses a drop. May I rise early and retire late in the day [because of Torah-study], as it is written, "The words of the Torah should never leave your speech; you shall talk Torah-words day and night." . . . Open my heart to Your Torah, that I may be like an everflowing stream to be incisive, and acute to understand, and to intuit, and that I will be swift to learn and slow to forget, that I should remember and learn well, and that my ears be open to listen to your Torah. Amen. So may it be."

After leaving the Beit Kneset: The Talmud states [Berachot 64a—Rabbi Levi bar Hiyiah says:] One who leaves the Beit Kneset and enters the Beit Midrash and occupies himself with Torah has the privilege of greeting the Shechina [The Divine Presence], as it says, "Going from strength to strength, they appear before God in Tzion." (Mishna Berura)

fix a time: The Talmud states [Shabbat 31a. Rava said:] When a man is brought to final judgment, they ask him, "Did you manage your business affairs faithfully? Did you fix times for Torah? [Did you engage in the Mitzvah of being fruitful and multiplying? Did you look intensely towards the Final Redemption?] . . . Besides, if he goes first to do business, we are afraid it might drag on, and he will not get to his Torah study. (Mishna Berura)

fix a time: The nature of Torah-study includes studying by yourself, which is considered fulfilling the positive Mitzvah of Talmud Torah [Study of Torah]. Nevertheless, he should make a point of studying whatever he can with others [**בחבורה**], because by means of this, the Honor of Heaven is even greater. And this is what HaZaL [**הז"ל** —Our sages, may their memory be for a blessing] mentioned in a number of places, [Quoting the Bible] The more people, the greater is the glory of the King [Proverbs 14:28] . . . They have also stated [Berachot 63b], Torah is only really acquired through a Havruta [i.e., when studied with others]. . . . and this is the custom in all Israel's congregations, that they have a fixed time to study with a Havruta after Tefillot in the Beit Kneset, and then they say a Rabbanan Kaddish [a special Kaddish originally set aside for recitation after Torah-study]. (Ba'ur Halacha)

fix a time: In the Yoreh De'ah [another section of the Shulḥan Aruch, here referring to section 246:1] it is explained that one should fix a time for Torah-study during the daytime and at night, and therefore, it is proper that, besides the morning-study [described above], he should fix a time also between Minḥa and Ma'ariv, and by this means he will also fulfill the obligation of Torah-study at night. (Ba'ur Halacha)

A group of the 1972 European Pilgrims will recall that when they first stepped into the Marina Roschcha Synagogue in Moscow, they found the men sitting and studying Torah. It was dusk, and they had completed Minḥa. Some of the Pilgrims were surprised, not that they were studying, but that, though they had come halfway round the world to be with the Moscow Jews, and though these Jews had not seen the leaders of the group for a year—they interrupted their study for only a moment, greeted us, returned to finish what they were studying, davened Ma'ariv, and then—and *only then*—were they ready to talk with us, sing with us, dance with us.

for study: The Mishna Berura, quoting another selection from the Shulḥan Aruch, makes an interesting historical remark, which I have italicized for emphasis:

One is obligated to study the written Torah every day, which is to say, Tanach [Bible], Mishna, Gemara, and Halachic texts. Those Balabatim [the everyday Jew, the Man-in-the-Street] *who study only 3 or 4 hours a day*, should not only study Talmud, which does not fulfill exclusively the Mitzvah. Rather they must also study Halachic texts, each according to his understanding.

so permanent: The Mishna Berura mentions a story in the Talmud [Eruvin 65a], namely, that "Rav Aḥa bar Ya'akov borrowed and repaid." Rashi explains as follows: He would set for himself such-and-such number of chapters of Mishna to study during each day, and his custom was to study in the daytime. Occasionally, however, he was preoccupied with making enough of a living to feed himself and his family during the day, he would "pay back" during the night [by covering the chapters he had not gone over during the day].

The Mishna Berura permits this practice of making up for what is missed during the day, but adds, ". . . And the Later Halachists have written that *always* before you leave the Beit Knesset in the morning—even if circumstances are very pressing and do not allow for extensive study—one should learn at least one verse or Halacha."

a great financial profit: And a man such as this is considered among the Men of Faith, who believes and trusts that God will not leave him without food because of his Torah-study, as the Jerusalem Talmud states [Berachot, end of Chapter 9], "What does the term 'Men of Faith' mean? An example of this is one [who was studying] whose buyers are shouting to him to bring out his merchandise to sell, and he responds by saying, 'I am not going to do away with my fixed time for Torah-study for the sake of making a profit. If I deserve to make a profit, it will come of itself, through God's help, even after I finish my fixed time for Torah-study.'" (Mishna Berura)

even if he does not know how to study: . . . As ḤaZaL have stated [Deuteronomy Rabbah, Ki Tavo 7:4], "Rabbi Yehoshua said in the name of Rav Naḥman, 'Whoever comes to the Beit Knesset and hears words of Torah will be privileged to sit among the Sages in the Future Time.'" (Mishna Berura)

Should one "receive the reward" for merely going to the place of study? Is there any value in just going there? Consider this in view of the principle מְתוּרָן לֹא לְשִׁמְהָ בְּאֵל לְשִׁמְהָ, that what one starts by doing for a secondary reason, he may ultimately be doing for the proper reason.

Is the stress which Judaism places on education a respect for the process of learning or the possession of knowledge?

Is it better to study a certain amount with others or to study more on one's own? Is the criterion quality or quantity of material covered?

Don't gloss over the phrase "each according to his understanding." This is not meant to minimize the person with a more limited background, but is a practical way to get the best use of time spent in study.

The practice of reading at least one chapter of the Bible, learning one Mishnah, or memorizing one verse or maxim every day is worthwhile. What would you start with? When will you start?

study a little: And if he studies only a little, it is best that his essential Torah-study should be Halachah, so that he should know how to act in veryday life. . . . And nowadays, there are a number of books containing the teachings of ḤaZaL which have been translated into Yiddish which anyone can read and study from. (Mishna Berura)

should consider his condition: The meaning is—he should examine, during some free time such as this in the Beit Midrash, whether or not there might be some wrongdoing in his business transactions, stealing, overcharging, usury, and the like, and if so, he should desist from such practices. (Mishna Berura)

Thus does the Mishna Berura tie in this section with the next, thereby making the intimate connection between the Beit Knesset, the Beit Midrash, and the “Great Big Wide World Out There.”

The reference to Yiddish must be seen at the time when the common spoken language was Yiddish. Now the pleasant task of where to begin is even easier with the countless volumes on so many topics available in English (or Hebrew with English translation).

קנו סדר משא ומתן ובו סניף אחד :

א א אחר כך ילך (6) לעסקיו רכל תורה שאין עמה מלאכה
סופה בשלה ונוררת עון כי העוני יעבירו על דעת קונו
ומכל מקום לא י יעשה א מלאכתו עיקר אלא (3) עראי
וחורתו קבע וזה וזה יתקיים בידו י וישא ויתן באמונה
ויזהר מלהוכיר שם שמים לבטלה שבכר מקום י שהזכרת
השם מצויה מיתה מצויה ויזהר מלישבע אפילו באמת
שאלף עירות היו לינאי המלך וכולם נחרבו בשביל שהיו
נשבעים שבועות אע"פ שהיו מקיימים אותם ויזהר מלהשתתף עם עכו"ם שמא ב יתחייב לו
שבועה ועובר משום לא ישמע על פיך :

156 Proceeding to One's Business Affairs

156:1 Afterwards, one may proceed to one's business affairs, because any Torah which is not accompanied with work will eventually come to nothing, and leads to sin, because poverty will cause him to transgress his creator's wishes. In any event, he should not make his work his principle occupation, but rather secondary—his Torah-study being primary. As a result, both [the work and the Torah-study] will succeed. He should carry out his business affairs faithfully. . . .

his principle occupation: Rather he should do only enough [business] to sustain himself. In this matter he must be careful of the seductiveness of the Evil Inclination, which seduces him [by saying] that he must work all day for a certain profit. (Mishna Berura)

will succeed: Because there is nothing that holds God back from saving someone either with a little help or much help. He will surely send blessings for the work of his hands.

faithfully: That is to say, that there should be no stealing or deception in his work. . . .

Do you think the pattern described in the Shulhan Aruch (prayer, followed immediately by study, followed by going to one's business) will create more moral business activities? Is the sequence listed at all surprising? Would you, in organizing such a law code, have put business affairs in such proximity to the section dealing with laws of the synagogue.

EPILOGUE

It is appropriate to conclude our study of the synagogue with the retelling of "The Conversion of Franz Rosenzweig." Franz Rosenzweig was raised in an assimilated German Jewish household. He was well on the way to converting to Christianity, when, suddenly, through a visit to a synagogue, his life was radically changed—to the point where he became one of this century's most influential teachers and thinkers. This is the way the Encyclopedia Judaica describes what happened:

.... Rosenzweig was the son of cultured parents whose adherence to Judaism was minimal and largely motivated by reactions to anti-Semitism. Rosenzweig entered university in 1905, studying a variety of disciplines, in a number of cities.... During this period, several of Rosenzweig's friends and relatives converted to Christianity, and he too contemplated conversion, arguing that he and his friends were Jews in name only—culturally, they were already Christians. However, he refrained from converting, because, like his parents, he regarded conversion as a socially cowardly act. In 1912, in Leipzig, he ran into a distant relative, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, who was on the way to becoming an unconventional but significant Protestant theologian. Out of his own highly literate and passionate faith, Rosenstock urged Rosenzweig to defend his nominal Jewishness or convert. After an intensive discussion on the night of July 7, 1913, Rosenzweig decided to convert, making only the reservation that he would become a Christian not as "a pagan" but "as a Jew," i.e., not by rejecting his Jewish origin but by recapitulating the consummation of Judaism in Christianity. He enacted this resolution by attending High Holiday services in a small Orthodox synagogue in Berlin, and he came out of this experience reversing his decision: he now declared that he knew himself to be a Jew; that the Jew does not need to seek God, for he is already with God; and that he intended henceforth to recover Judaism for himself and, possibly, for others like him. The circumstances under which this "return" to Judaism occurred continued to influence Rosenzweig's life and religious views to the end.