

MITZVAH 21: RESPECTING HOLY PLACES

by Rabbi Moshe Goldberger

"You shall fear My sanctuary." (Vayikra 19:30)

One must respect the holiness of shuls and yeshivos, for they are considered miniature forms of the Beis Hamikdash. This means that one should avoid joking and speaking idly in them.

The object of our fear and respect is not the holy place itself but rather Hashem, who instructed us to fear it (Rambam, Hilchos Beis HaBechira 7:1). One should walk into a holy place with the awareness that Hashem's presence is there (ibid., 5).

The Tosafos Yom Tov writes that in his days there were terrible massacres in which thousands of Jews were killed. The sages of the time inquired from Heaven to find out what caused these massacres, and they were informed that it was due to inappropriate talking in shuls and yeshivos. Because people are created in God's image, their words can have a great impact on the world. If we misuse our gift of speech, our words can cause great harm. May Hashem spare us and help us to improve our ways.

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