

CHAPTER 9 - THE SYNAGOGUE

by Rabbi Dr. Azriel Rosenfeld

The residents of a town must build a synagogue and buy Torah scrolls and other holy books (150:1). When possible, the synagogue should be built at the highest point of the town, and should be taller than any other inhabited building; see 150:2-3. The entrance of the synagogue should be opposite the side that the congregation faces to pray (150:5), and nothing should be built near the synagogue's windows (150:4). The Ark (where the Torah scrolls are kept) should be on the side that the congregation faces, and the platform (BIMAH) from which the Torah is read should be built in the center (150:5). The leader faces the Ark; the elders sit along that side, facing the congregation (150:5).

A person should behave seriously in a synagogue or house of study (151:1). He should not go into them for shelter, or use them for relaxation, or work in them (except for religious purposes), or eat or drink in them (although scholars are allowed to eat and drink, particularly in a house of study, if necessary); see 151:1,4. A person who must go into them to see someone should pray, study, or sit down briefly first, so he will not appear to have gone in only on business (151:1). Eulogies must not be delivered in them, except for prominent people (151:1). [These things do not apply to a house of study in a private home (151:2).] A person should not sleep in a synagogue, even briefly, unless he needs to be there overnight, but naps in a house of study are permitted (151:3-4). A person should not enter a synagogue with dirty clothes or bareheaded; see 151:6,8. A synagogue should not be used as a shortcut (see 151:5) and should not be littered (see 151:7); it should be kept clean and well-lit (see 151:9).

A synagogue should not be torn down or sold (see 153:7) until a replacement for it has been built, unless it is in danger of collapsing, and parts of it may be taken down only on condition that they be rebuilt; see 152:1. Even a ruined synagogue must be treated respectfully, but it may be used for dignified purposes if this was stipulated when it was built; see 151:10-11. The materials of a ruined synagogue must not be used even to build a new one (152:1). The attic above a synagogue must not be used for disrespectful purposes; but if part of an existing building is made into a synagogue, the other parts of the building may continue to be used (151:12). These things do not apply to a place that is used for prayers only temporarily; see 154:1-2. A synagogue may be converted into a house of study, but not vice versa (153:1).

When holy things are sold, or money is collected to buy them, or materials are collected to make them, the sale must be advertised (see 153:7) and the proceeds may be used only for purposes that are at least equally holy; but once the purpose of the collection has been achieved, any surplus may

be used for other purposes (see 153:2-5), but must not be used for disrespectful purposes (see 153:9). [Holy things may also be sold for such purposes as supporting scholars or marrying off orphans (153:6,13).] These rules do not apply to property that belongs to an individual (see 153:10,12,14-20,22; 154:15), or that has not yet been used for holy purposes, or to a sale made with the agreement of the city's leaders (see 153:7-9). Exchanging holy things or giving them as gifts is like selling them, but renting or lending them (to use for other purposes) is not permitted; see 153:11. On things that should not be used for holy purposes see 153:21;154:11-12. On the treatment of things that are used in association with holy things see 154:3, 6-7. On how to dispose of holy things that are no longer usable see 154:4-5; on what to do if they are still partly usable see 154:6. Holy things may be used for other purposes if this was specified or understood originally; see 154:8-10,13-14.

After the morning services, and after eating breakfast (see 155:2), a person should set aside time for Torah study (see 155:1). He may then go to work; but the Torah study should be regarded as the more important occupation (156:1). A person should be careful not to swear or to use Divine Names casually (see 156:1) and not to slander anyone (see 606:3), and should rebuke sinners when possible (see 608:2; Yoreh De'ah 334:48). If a person must sleep during the day, he should take only a brief nap; see 231:1.

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