

## You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations from whom you shall take possession worshipped their gods... You shall not do so to Hashem, your G-d. (12:2,4)

*Rashi* quotes the *Sifrei* (61), which offers a homiletic rendering of this *pasuk*: “Would it enter one’s mind that the Jews (Israel) would shatter their Altars?” What, then, does the Torah mean when it writes, “You shall not do this to Hashem, your G-d?” We would never do to our holy places what we are being commanded to do to the shrines of the idol worshippers. “*Rabbi Yishmael taught that Israel (Jews) should [be careful] not to do [deeds] like their deeds* (i.e., commit sins that will cause them to be exiled) **and** [thus] **your sins would cause the Bais HaMikdash of your fathers to be destroyed.**” What are these sins? Why would anyone sin in the *bais ha’medrash*? This admonition is not directed to the lowest of the low, but to the “*crème de crème*,” the individuals who attend the *bais ha’medrash*.

*Horav Matis Blum, Shlita*, cites the *Sefer Chassidim* which teaches us a frightening lesson. *Rabbeinu Yehudah HaChassid* writes, “If you see the house that once belonged to a *tzaddik*, righteous person, or a *shul*, which is now destroyed or inhabited by wicked people, you should know that (it is because) Jewish people had previously lived there in a disgraceful manner.” In his commentary to *Sefer Chassidim*, the *Mekor Chesed* cites *Chazal* in the *Talmud Megillah* 28b, who state that, “A *shul* in which mundane calculations (business) is conducted, in the end, will one day serve as a morgue for a *meis mitzvah*, corpse who has no family to bury him.” “Likewise, a *shul* or *bais ha’medrash* in which *ka’lus rosh*, levity, is commonplace, in the end, will fall into the hands of gentiles.” “Indeed, the ‘uncircumcised ones’ (gentiles) never practiced degradation and disgrace in the House of G-d, unless they were first preceded by Jews who did the same. Last, the gentiles do nothing evil to the Jewish people unless the Jews have acted in such a manner among themselves.”

We derive a powerful lesson from the Pietist’s homily. Whatever befalls us is a direct consequence of our own doing. When we mistreat a fellow Jew; when our *shuls* become nothing more than an extension of Starbucks; when our *davening* is, at best, an endeavor which we must endure; when the *shul* politics are as underhanded and evil as in the secular political arena, then **we** are guilty of destroying Hashem’s Altar. **We** set the stage for the gentile demolition crew to enter our Sanctuary to do what they want with it. After all, we have already denuded it of its sanctity. The *goyim* will just finish the job.