

In order to prolong your days and the days of your children upon the ground that Hashem has sworn to your ancestors to give to them. (11:21)

A fascinating dialogue in the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 8A) should inspire our attitude toward the *Bais Haknesses*, *shul*, that we frequent. Rabbi Yochanan lived to an unusually advanced age. Rabbi Yochanan heard that elderly Jews lived in Bavel. This caused him to wonder, "It is written, 'In order to prolong your days and the days of your children upon the ground that Hashem has sworn to your ancestors to give to them.' (This means *Eretz Yisrael*. In other words, the blessing of longevity is tied in with living in the Holy Land.)" Once they informed him, however, that the elders are people who arise early to attend *shul* and stay late in the evening, he understood (the reason for their long lives). If we think about it, Rabbi Yochanan's question was not answered. The basis for his question was *al ha'adamah*, upon the ground, which refers to *Eretz Yisrael*. The Torah does not distinguish between *shul* attendance or not. Rather, it emphasizes the benefits of living in *Eretz Yisrael*.

The *Kli Yakar* explains that early *shul* attendance and leaving late makes it as if they are in the Holy Land. Indeed, *Chazal* (*Megillah* 29A) state that, with the advent of *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*, the *shuls* and *batei midrash* of the diaspora will be transplanted to *Eretz Yisrael*. Having received Holy Land status, the *shuls* and *batei medrash* are the places to be. [I think the Torah might be alluding to this with the use of the word "days" as opposed to "years," which is more germane to longevity.]

Based upon *Chazal's* statement that the *shuls* and *batei midrashim* of the diaspora will be transplanted to *Eretz Yisrael*, we should ask ourselves: Are our *shuls* sufficiently spiritually correct to be transplanted to the Holy Land? Will we feel comfortable in the religious milieu, in the air of sanctity that will surely permeate the Holy Land post-advent of *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*? Perhaps *Chazal* are alluding to us that we should elevate the sanctity of our mini *Batei Mikdash* (and ourselves, when we attend) in preparation for that glorious day when we will be in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Horav Aharon Tzvi, zl, m'Brisk (who was an *Av Beis Din* in Cheka, Transylvania, and then later in Arad, *Eretz Yisrael*, where he established a small *yeshivah*, *Bais Moshe*), devoted his life to teaching and inspiring Jewish children. He preached love of *Eretz Yisrael* and the requirement to make *aliyah*. The *shul* played a significant role in his life and teachings. He was once asked to speak at the *chanukas ha'bayis*, dedication, of a new *shul*. He was well aware that the *shul* attendance of the younger, upcoming generation left much to be desired. Indeed, when he walked to the lectern to speak, he noted that the assemblage consisted primarily of the older generations. Very few members' children were in attendance. Understandably, the *Rav* was upset. He opened his *drashah*, speech, with the following exposition: "When the *Mishkan* was completed, Moshe looked over the finished product and noted that the people had executed their work exactly as Hashem had commanded them." Moshe blessed them (39:43). *Rashi* quotes the *Midrash*

(*Shemos Rabbah* 2:9) which details the content of the blessing. *Yehi ratzon she'tishreh Shechinah b'maaseh yedeichem*; "May it be Hashem's will that the *Shechinah* rest upon our handiwork..."

Some communities build magnificent *shuls* and *batei midrash*, characterized by aesthetics that are both elegant and engaging. They are a place in which one can bask in the beauty and serenity of his surroundings and offer up his prayer to Hashem with great fervor. [This in no way implies that *davening* in a basement or storefront is any less inspiring. One can *daven* to Hashem wherever he is. It is just more peaceful, and, for some, more motivating.] Sadly, these impressive edifices are empty of the younger generation. Indeed, when the elderly Jews to whom *shul* attendance is life itself pass on to a better world, who will fill the corridors of these *shuls*? Why is this? Because the parents have failed to educate and inculcate their children with the notion that one rises early to attend *shul* and spends as much time as possible there in prayer and Torah study. Had they focused their education on these values, the *shul* would not be devoid of its next generation. When Moshe *Rabbeinu* gazed upon the nation's handiwork in producing the *Mishkan*, resplendent in its beauty and captivating in its majesty, he exclaimed, "May the *Shechinah* rest on your handiwork." *Maaseh yadayim*, handiwork, is an allusion to children. Moshe blessed the nation that their progeny should attend, be a vital part of the *shul*. The *bais ha'medrash* should be the centerpiece of their lives. After all, if the next generation rebuffs the *shul*, what benefit is gained from its beauty and sublimity?"

Horav Moshe Leib, zl, m'Sasov was once asked if he would consider moving to *Eretz Yisrael*. The *Sasover* quoted *Chazal* concerning the *shuls* in the *diaspora* maintaining a similar opportunity for spiritual growth as experienced living in *Eretz Yisrael*. As long as one makes the *shul* and the *bais ha'medrash* his "home," if he arrives early in the morning to prepare himself to *daven* and leaves late, then the *shul* has the *kedushah*, sanctity, of *Eretz Yisrael*. If when one is in the *shul*, it is as if he was living in *Eretz Yisrael*. If one is so certain of his spiritual level that he feels that he could "move into" the *shul* with his entire family and maintain the sacred nature of the *shul*, he is able to move to *Eretz Yisrael* [which is considered one large *shul*]. If, however, he does not feel this way, if he feels that he is yet distant from living in the *shul* and maintaining himself on its demanding level of *kedushah*, holiness, he should not move to the Holy Land.