

*THE SANCTITY OF THE SYNAGOGUE
AND THE AMEN RESPONSE # 25*

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DOES YOUR SYNAGOGUE HAVE
A KOSHER MECHITZA?

**RESPONSA OF RABBI HILLEL
LICHTENSTEIN MI KOLOMEA ZTK" L**

CAN ONE ENTER A SYNAGOGUE WITH A FAULTY PARTITION?

Friday, New Moon Day, Adar 1873, Kolomea, Austria; to my dear, beloved friend, the reverent scholar R. Wolf Leb ... peace:

You ask with your very soul, if it is permitted to enter a synagogue where the partition (mechitzah) dividing the women's section from the men's is so thin that the men can see the women -i.e., if one is not of the defiant transgressors, but wishes to submit to the verdict of the Bet din (religious court). I do not know what there is to question here. It has already been clearly stated that it is forbidden to make the partition in such a way that the men can regard the women, and if the partition has already been so made, one should not enter there. This applies all the more strongly in your instance, for originally the division there was thick and well made, and people changed it with the intention of (thus] joining the violators and innovators...

Moreover, even if there is not a single woman in the synagogue, it is forbidden to enter and pray there: for on account of this willful violation it has become desecrated and is no longer a "sanctuary in miniature (Mikdash Meat)."

Since I find your words so appealing, I will answer insofar as my poor hand is able. Now you are stirred by the question: Why were curtains not put up at the Festivity of the Water for Libation, in the Temple, so that the men could not gaze at the women? The answer seems to me to lie in Maimonides' comment to the Mishnah (Sukkah 5, 2): "A great amendment- i.e., of great value, because the people used to prepare a location for men and another for women; and the place for the women was above the one for the men, in order that the men should not gaze at the women." If we note his language carefully, we see that he could have said simply, "the place for the women was above, in order that the men" etc.; why state, "the place for the women was above the one for the men"? It therefore seems to me that Maimonides means just this: it was arranged for the men to sit precisely underneath the balconies, but not beyond them, for if the latter the men could still have stared upward. He therefore is intentionally specific (to intimate that the] location for the men was only the space underneath the balconies.... Hence there was no need for a partition....

Do not take it to heart or take it ill that you will pray alone; for the Writings say: Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith (Proverbs 15:17).

G-d grant us the merit to see Him fulfill His word for all: that the Lord thy G-d will circumcise thy heart ... to love the Lord thy G-d with all thy heart (Deuteronomy 30:6).

NOW THERE ARE FOOLS WHO ALLOW THEIR SYNAGOGUES TO HAVE A MECHITZA WHERE YOU CAN SEE WOMEN! NOT ONLY ARE THEY NOT DOING A MITZVAH BUT ON THE CONTRARY THEY CAUSE MANY PEOPLE TO STUMBLE IN SIN

MAYBE YOU NEVER HEARD YOUR RABBI TALKING ABOUT THESE THINGS FOR IT MAY NOT BE IN HIS BEST INTEREST TO TELL YOU. SO EVEN IF YOUR RABBI RIDICULES YOU FOR KEEPING THE SHULCHAN ARUCH YOU SHOULD BE STRONG AND GO AHEAD FOR IT MAY BE THAT YOUR RABBI BELONGS TO THE EREV RAV AND HE JUST DOES NOT WANT YOU TO KEEP THE TORAH AS IT SHOULD BE FOR MAYBE HE WOULD BE EXPOSED AS A FAKE IN THE EYES OF THE OTHER CONGREGANTS WHEN THEY SEE THAT A COMMON PERSON KEEPS THE SHULCHAN ARUCH TO A GREATER EXTENT THAN THE RABBI. AND WE ARE NOT TALKING ABOUT PIOUS PRACTICES BUT WE ARE TALKING HERE ABOUT KEEPING THE SHULCHAN ARUCH, SPECIFICALLY CONCERNING THOSE AREAS WHERE THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF OUR TIME ARE LAX ABOUT. FOR EXAMPLE, TALKING IN THE SYNAGOGUE IN THE MIDDLE OF PRAYERS, DURING THE KADDISH, GIVING TORAH LESSONS TO MEN AND WOMEN WITHOUT A MECHITZA, HAVING A DEFICIENT MECHITZA IN SHUL, LOOKING AT WOMEN WHICH IS SOMETHING FORBIDDEN, ETC