

Stale Synagogues

By Rabbi Yehudah ben Shomeyr

Though I feel more at home in an Orthodox Shul than I do in a Christian Church or even Messianic Synagogue, I do have my issues with most Orthodox Shuls.

In the majority of Orthodox Synagogues I have been to there is such a lack of fervor and passion. Worship and prayers seems very sloppy and nonchalant. G-d is approached ritualistically, yet casually. I see not reverential fear or any air of holiness in approaching G-d at the Shul. I see magazines inside the pages of the Chumash. I see Bernie and Sal, Rivkah and Hannah chit chatting during the Amidah. Mr. Finkelstien is nodding off in the back. There is little depth to the drash. There is no passion in the davening. Children talk and run from the women's side to the men's while the Torah is being read. It's as if there is an attitude that, "We are Jews and that is enough."

Matthew 9:1In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

2And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

3For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

4And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

5Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,

6And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

7But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

9And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

10And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

11I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

12Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

G-d is holy and demands we reciprocate and be holy in return. In other words, if we act nonchalant, casual and flippant toward G-d, we will do the same with us; we reap what we sow (Deut. 27-28). You get out of your relationship with G-d and the Torah service exactly what you put into it.

I am so sick of this, “going through the motions” and I know G-d is too.

Isaiah 1:11 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

12When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?

13Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

14Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.

15And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

16Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;

17Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

18Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

19If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:

20But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

21How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.

Rev 3:15-17 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

Sometimes I feel if I am the only one riveted to the Rabbi's words and davening with all my might as everything else fades around me.

Apathy is a cruel, slow, contagious and silent killer like leprosy that should be cast outside the camp as the Torah commands!

Rev. 2:1Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

2I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

3And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

4Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

5Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

Bernie and Sal can chat during service, but G-d forbid you take notes during the Shabbat drash and don't even think about turning on or off a light!

Matt. 23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

24Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

25Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

26Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

29Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

30And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

31Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

32Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

33Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

People seem to want to discuss the weather or the latest shul gossip than discuss the current Parashah!

Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ (Which is Torah) dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Parenthesis mine)

In the Perkei Avot if Torah is not discussed at some point when two Jews meet it is considered a waste of time and a meeting of thieves!

Where is the holy chutzpah, where is the excitement of serving HaShem!? This type of devotion and service isn't reserved for the Rabbi's, Sages or the Tzadikim! It is G-d's desire everyone love and serve Him with all their being.

Deut. 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

5And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

I will if no one else will.

Joshua 24:15b But as for me and my house, we will serve the L-RD.

Change should, but doesn't start with the Rabbi, it starts with me, and it starts with you. Just as apathy is contagious, so is passion.