

Rabbi Ephraim Sprecher

No Talking in Shul

“My Shabbatot you shall observe, and My Sanctuary you shall revere” (Vayikra 19:30).

Rashi comments that giving the proper respect to the Sanctuary (Beit HaMikdash) is expressed by not entering with one's walking stick, or while wearing shoes or a money belt or with dust on ones feet.

Today we have no Beit HaMikdash, but the Gemara in Megila 29 teaches that our shuls are MIKDASH M'AT, which means mini-sanctuaries and must be treated with great respect and reverence.

Tractate Derech Eretz Raba, one of the 14 so called “minor tractates”, chapter 3, records an incident at the end of the life of Rabi Elazar ben Azariya when he was seriously ill, his students came to him and asked him “How can we be worthy of life in the World to Come?” He answered them “Go out and be careful with the honor due to your friends, and when you are standing in prayer, know before Whom you are standing. This will earn you life in the World to Come.”

Chavos Yair wonders why R' Elazar ben Azariya prefaces his advice with the words “Go out”. It seems out of place and irrelevant to the advice he offers.

He explains that R' Elazar ben Azariya's comment for addressing the great

difficulty some people have avoiding talking during davening. This occurs mainly on Shabbat when friends see each other and have time to catch up on news of family, community, business or sports.

Unfortunately this talking often takes place during davening or K'ria't HaTorah and leads to a desecration of Hashem's Sanctuary. At times a person feels that it is impolite not to respond to a question or comment from one's shul friend and feels compelled to talk, even if it is in the middle of davening in shul.

In this light, we can understand the message of R' Elazar ben Azariya. If you want to be careful in the honor due your friends, then GO OUT of Shul and talk there. When you are davening in shul, be aware before Whom you are praying. This will earn you life in the World to Come!

If only people would take to heart the words of the Chavos Yair and thereby bring about a marked improvement in the decorum in our shuls, they would then merit the great benefits that come from sincere prayer. **-ESP**