YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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UNDERSTANDING AGGADA

By Rav Yitzchak Blau

Shiur #09b: The Synagogue as House and Temple

Rav Chelbo taught in the name of Rav Huna: "A person who leaves the synagogue should not take large steps (as when running)."

Abbaye said: "This was only said with regard to leaving. But with regard to coming to the synagogue, it is a *mitzva* to run, as it says 'Then we shall know, we shall chase after knowing God' (*Hoshea* 6:3)" (*Berakhot* 6b)

On its surface, this gemara is advocating excitement in coming to shul and reluctance to leave. R. Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, however, adds a deeper level of analysis (in his *Lefrakim,* p. 362) that takes on added meaning in the context of his own biography. R. Weinberg both learned in the Slobodka yeshiva in Lithuania and pursued academic Jewish studies in Berlin. He understood the tensions between the ways of Eastern European Orthodoxy and those of their brethren in the West, and he lived out that tension in his own life. With this introduction, we can now turn to his commentary.

R. Weinberg points out that royal courts place much emphasis on ceremony and etiquette. In these courts, people's clothing and movements must demonstrate exacting precision. In the same way, Western Jews have made the synagogue into a temple in which aesthetics and order are paramount. They come to shul once a year and make sure to follow all the correct rules of procedure. These Jews look down upon their Eastern brothers, who lack this education in manners and etiquette. However, the Westerners forget that the Eastern European Jews enter the shul daily. For this latter group, the shul resembles one's home much more than a palace or temple. In the home, the need for order ceremony is minimal.

For R. Weinberg, this gemara in *Berakhot* teaches the ideal balance. A Jew runs to shul with the excitement of the child running home to see his parents. However, while in shul, that Jew encounters the Creator of the universe, becomes purified and assumes a feeling of nobility. As an aristocrat, the Jew must leave the shul with measured dignity.

May our own shuls strive towards this ideal mix of warmth and familiarity with dignity and nobility.