# **Lecture Proposal: Between Synagogue and Study Hall**

Historians of the late Second Temple period and the period of the Mishnah and Talmud, together with researchers of prayer, point to change in the role of the synagogue from a place of public gathering, Torah readings, sermons and Torah study to the central place for public prayer. This process is related to the institutionalization of set prayers and public prayer, which took place following the destruction of the Second Temple. The revolution in the use of the synagogue was completed during the period of the Tannaim and the Amoraim, and since that time the synagogue has served primarily as a place of public prayer.

In my lecture, I would like to show that although this transformation appeared to be complete, there were still those within the Jewish world who held alternative positions regarding the status of the synagogue and the appropriate place for prayer. These divergent approaches are expressed, for example, by those who preferred to pray outside the synagogue, the common people in the fields and Torah scholars in the study hall. In addition, we find criticism – implicit and explicit – of the crowding in public synagogues and their lack of suitability for serious religious service, including Torah study and prayer.

The focus of the lecture will be a discussion of a section of the first chapter of Tractate BT Berakhot5b - 8b, that combines Halakhah and *aggadah*, where this tension is clearly expressed. I would like to show how the redaction of the *sugyah*, was designed to grapple with this tension, even though at first glance it seems that the *sugyah* wishes to reinforce the significance of the synagogue and to encourage its use as a place of prayer.

Incidentally, I will argue that this is a typical phenomenon found in talmudic *sugyot* that integrate both elements of Halakhah and *aggadah*. By using complex redaction techniques, a proposal is raised that points to tension between two extreme positions, even as the main aim of the *sugyah* is to express its preference one of the two values. I dealt extensively with this topic in my book *Applied Aggadah* (Part I, Jerusalem, 2005; Part II, Jerusalem 5763), where I bring several examples supporting this approach.

Sincerely,

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