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

Historians of the late Second Temple period and the period of the Mishanah and Talmud, together with scholars who study 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 establishment 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 Tanaim 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 change appeared to be complete, within normative Judaism there were still those 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, like “the people in the fields” and the Torah scholars in the Beit Midrash. In addition, we find criticism – covert or overt – 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 *Brakhot (Bavli Berakhot* 5b - 8b), that combines *halakhah* and *aggadah*, where this tension is clearly expressed. I would like to show how the discussion, as it appears, is designed to grapple with this tension, even though at first glance it appears that the intention of the Gemara is to strengthen the significance of the synagogue and to encourage prayer there.

Incidentally, I will argue that this is a typical phenomenon found in Talmudic discussions that contain both elements of *halakhah* and *Aggadah*. By using complex editing, a proposal is raised that points to tension between two extreme positions, even as the main thrust of the discussion clearly prefers 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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