

The importance of a mechitza in a Shul

By the Grace of G-d
10th of Nissan, 5721
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Greeting and Blessing:

This is in reply to your letter and questions:

(1) Regarding the Mechitzah in the synagogue.

You mention several explanations which have been suggested to you, according to which the necessity for a Mechitzah would be qualified and limited to certain conditions only.

Let me preface my answer with a general observation about a misconception in this matter. It is a mistake to think that the Mechitzah is degrading to the honor or dignity of the Jewish woman. The best proof of this is that although the love of parents for their children is not only a very natural one, but has even been hallowed by the Torah, as we pray to G-d to show us the same fatherly feeling ("As a father has mercy on his children"), yet there is a Din in the Shulchan Aruch that it is forbidden to kiss one's children in Shul, and, moreover, even-not during the time of prayer. Not to mention the Din of the Torah to esteem and honor every human being created in the "image" of G-d. To think that there could be anything degrading in the Mechitzah is to betray complete ignorance not only of the significance of the Mechitzah but of the whole attitude and way of the Torah.

✓Brach Chaim
9/2/1

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The inner and essential reason for the Mechitzah - since you insist on an explanation - is that the synagogue, and the time of prayer in general (even when recited at home), are not merely the place and time when a formal petition is offered to Him Who is able to fulfill the petition; it is much more profound than that. It is the time and place when the person offering the prayer unites himself with Him to Whom the prayer is offered, by means of the prayer. And as our Sages declare: Know before Whom you stand: before the Supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He. "Know" (da), as the term daas is explained in the Tanya, in the sense of unity, as in "And Adam knew Eve." The union of two things can be complete only when there is not a third element involved, be it even a matter of holiness and the like.

From the above it follows that there certainly must be nothing to distract the attention and the kavonah, so as to permit the utmost

attunement of the heart and mind towards the attainment of the highest degree of unity with G-d.

From the above it also follows that the separation of the sexes by a Mechitzah has nothing to do with any particular condition or state in the women, as has been suggested to you.

It further follows also that the purpose of the Mechitzah is not just to set up a visible boundary for which a Mechitzah of several inches might do, but it must be one that completely hides the view, otherwise a Mechitzah does not accomplish ^{all} its purposes.*

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I have indicated above, though quite briefly, some of the basic facts about a Mechitzah and the essential explanation behind it in order to answer your questions and satisfy your curiosity. I must say, however, quite emphatically that the approach of measuring Torah and Mitzvoth by the yardstick of the limited and often fallacious human reason is totally wrong. The human intellect is a very unreliable guage, and quite changeable from one extreme to the other. Even in the so-called exact sciences, the unreliability of human reason and deduction has been amply demonstrated, and what was one day considered as an "absolute" truth is the next ^{day} abrogated with equal certainty and absoluteness. Hence to presume to make conditions in regard to the eternal and G-d-given Torah and Mitzvoth is completely out of place.

Therefore, inasmuch as we have been instructed to have a Mechitzah in the house of prayer, it would violate even the common sense to present a petition to the Almighty in a manner which displeases Him, and to add insult to injury, to declare that "the reason I do not accept this regulation is because ~~in~~ my human intelligence suggests to act otherwise than is the will of the En Sof, yet, Please fulfil my request anyway!"

Much more should be said on this subject, but it is difficult to do so in a letter.

(2) You ask, How can one accept the Mishnah "All Israel have a portion in the world to come" and how, by the widest stretch of the imagination, can one believe that the worst "apikores" will have a share in the world to come?

The answer to your question may be found in various sources and is especially illuminated in the sources of Chasidus at length.

The belief of our Jewish people in true Monotheism is, of course, the very basis of our faith and way of life. This means not only that there is only One G-d and none other beside Him, but "nothing else beside Him" (ein od milvado). The whole Creation and all the worlds have no reality of their own, for there is only one Reality - G-d, inasmuch as a spark of G-dliness animates and keeps everything in

^(Chasidic)
*) Some ^{Chasidic} ~~versions~~ re Mechitzah see 'En Sof 28-60 (N.Y. 5714)

existence, as it is written, "By the word of G-d the heavens were created" etc. This "word" of G-d is the essence and reality of everything.

Jews). Thus, the individual you call "apikores" is also animated by the "word" of G-d, which is surely eternal, for that individual is also a part of Creation and is animated and sustained in the same way. Except that it was the will of the Creator that this individual ^{for all} created by the word of G-d, should have complete freedom to choose good or bad, life or death, as it is written, "Behold, I place before you this day life and good, and death and evil". The individual who misuses this gift of freedom and chooses evil, loses and forfeits that part of his G-d-given energy which went into the commission of the sin or omission of the Mitzvah, which, had he chosen otherwise, would have been imbued with an eternal quality. However, the very essence of his reality, that is, that which has been created and came into being by the word of G-d, cannot be destroyed, so long as it retains its essential character. It can only be soiled and stained by sin, G-d forbid.

But inasmuch as every individual Jew is a "whole world," as our Sages said, and, moreover, the whole universe was created for his sake, and as the Sages commented on the word "Breishis" - for the sake of Yisroel called "Reishis," the Jew who sinned must undergo various transformations and stages of purgatory to be cleansed of the impurities which had attached themselves to his soul, which is his essence, and which has a portion in the world to come because of its eternal quality.

This is also what our Sages ~~xx~~ meant when they succinctly said - as they often compress a far-reaching idea into a few concise words - by way of explanation immediately following the statement in the said Mishnah of Kol Yisroel: "For it is written, 'And Thy people are all righteous... a branch of My planting, the work of My hand to be glorified ~~(by them)~~'." Because every Jew contains in him something which is like a branch of the Divine Tree and the work of G-d's own hands, it is eternal, and that is why "Every Jew has a portion in the world to come."

I trust that in harmony with your search for knowledge which you display in your letter, you have regular daily periods of study of the Torah and the Torah view, and that is the kind of study which leads to action and practice in the daily life, as our Sages emphasized that the essential thing is the deed.

The enclosed message ~~xxx~~ will surely be of interest to you.

Wishing you and your fellow students a kosher, happy and inspiring Pesach,

With blessing

By