



# SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

## DISTRIBUTION DATE:

**TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 5<sup>TH</sup>, 2011 / ו' אלול**

## PARSHA:

Ki Tetzei / **כִּי תֵצֵא**

## SERMON TITLE:

The House of Prayer: A Place of Peace

**A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE**

The author is solely responsible for the contents of this document.

Sponsored by Shimon Aron & Devorah Leah Rosenfeld & Family  
In loving memory of

ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל  
Emil W. Herman  
who loved and supported Torah learning.

# Ki Tetzei

## The House of Prayer: A Place of Peace

Well, tomorrow is 9/11—the infamous September 11th. And it's not just 9/11, but it's the 10th anniversary of 9/11.

Now, since the day of 9/11, most of us have had opinions, and strong ones, on what to do about terrorism, or what to build at Ground Zero, or what America's foreign policy should be.

But for the past couple of years, there's been another issue that has stoked strong opinions: the so-called "Ground Zero Mosque."

While the fact is that the building in question isn't just going to house a mosque but will also house a community center, including a gym and swimming pool, there is still fierce debate about it—even though it's not even being built at Ground Zero but rather, a block or two from Ground Zero.

Which brings us to these questions: What does Judaism have to say about such an issue? And what does this have to do with this week's Torah portion?

The answer, as I like to say, is: everything!

So let's start with a story about King David.

King David once summoned the Prophet Nathan, and said the following to him (I Chronicles 17:1): "Here I am sitting in the House of Cedars—and the Ark of G-d's Covenant is under sheets?!"

In plain English: "Here I am living in a nice big house—and the Holy Ark is sitting in a tent! It's not nice and not respectful that I'm in a building that's nicer than where the Ark is being kept.

I want to build a nice big house for the Ark too: the Beis Hamikdash.”

And so Nasan HaNavi gave King David his approval and said it’s a good idea.

But that night, G-d came to Nasan and instructed him to go immediately to the king and tell him the following (17:2): “You shall not build Me the house.” Why? “You spilled blood to excess and great wars did you wage; you shall not build a house for My Name for much blood have you poured earthward before Me. Behold, a son is born unto you; a man of repose shall he be... for Shlomo shall be his name and peace and quiet [shall there be]... in his days; he will build a house for My Name” (23:8-9-10).

So while King David had everything ready and wanted to build the Beis Hamikdash, because he had been involved in many wars and many people had lost their lives because of him, he was not qualified to be the one to build the Holy Temple, a house of peace.

We find this concept in halachah, too.

If you’ve been to shul on the High Holidays or Pesach, Shavuos and Sukkos, you know that the Kohanim, go to the front of the shul to bless the congregation.

This means they stand in front of everyone and recite the Birkas Kohanim, the Priestly Blessing.

(Outside the Holy Land, Birkas Kohanim is only done on the holidays. In Jerusalem, however, the Kohanim do it every day.)

Now, along comes the halachah and states: “A Kohain who killed someone, even accidentally, should not lift his hands.” (The Blessing is recited with the hands raised in the air, like this.)

So for the same reason that King David could not build the Beis Hamikdash, a Kohein who killed someone can’t recite Birkas Kohanim: “Your hands are filled with blood.”

Now when King Shlomo actually built the Beis Hamikdash, we discover something very interesting.

Sefer Melachim, the Book of Kings (I 6:7), tells us: "All metal tools were not heard in the House during its construction."

As Maimonides (Laws of the House of Choice 1:14) explains: While they were building the Temple, not a single metal tool was used on the construction site. If they needed to cut stones, they would cut them off-site. But on the Temple Mount itself, the noise of metal tools was not heard.

Not only that, but when it came to building the Mizbayach, the Altar, the Torah tells us at the end of the Torah portion of Yisro that when an altar is built, the use of any metal tools on the altar's stones is strictly forbidden. Why? Rashi (Shmos 20:22) explains: "The Mizbayach was created to lengthen man's days, and metal was created to shorten man's days; it is not appropriate for the shortener to be waved above the lengthener."

From time immemorial, most weapons have been made of metal—and so a material that was "made" to shorten man's life, the metal that mankind uses to kill people, may not come in contact with something whose entire purpose of creation is to extend the lives of people.

But what indeed is the purpose, the mission, of the Beis Hamikdash—and specifically, the Mizbayach, the Altar? Very simple: the Jew would come to the Temple, bring up a sacrifice to G-d, reconcile himself with G-d and thus live a longer life.

That was the entire purpose of the Beis Hamikdash. And that's why there's no place for metal to even touch the stones of the Mizbayach, let alone be part of its construction.

From all this we see that in Judaism, a person or thing that shortens man's life has no place in a house of prayer, whose entire purpose is to connect man with G-d and thus lengthen man's life.

Now here's an interesting historical anecdote: 250 years before the Destruction of the First Temple, there was a noblewoman living in Jerusalem by the name of Atalya. She was married to Yehoram, the King of Judah, who was a descendant of King David.

Now one not-so-fine day, her husband and son were murdered. Out of fear and worry that they would soon crown another descendant of the House of David, which would make her queen no longer, she ordered her servants to kill and annihilate all living members of the royal family so that there would not be any descendant of King David left alive.

Once that was done, she crowned herself the Queen of Judah.

But out of that great slaughter, one baby was saved. His name was Yoash. He had been smuggled out of the palace by the Kohain Gadol Yehoyada and his wife Yehosheva.

But where do you hide a baby who comes from the royal Davidic dynasty? Jerusalem was crawling with the queen's spies everywhere. How could one secretly protect such a child for any serious length of time?

You may not believe this, but Yehoyada the Kohein Gadol decided to hide Yoash in the Kodesh HaKodashim, the Holy of Holies. That was the one room in the Beis Hamikdash that was the holiest place on earth. It was the place where the Holy Ark, was kept, and it was the place where only the Kohein Gadol, the holiest of human beings, could enter, and only once a year, on the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur.

As such, it was the most secure location, because no one except the Kohein Gadol could get in there—and so no one would discover the child there.

And so, the child was hidden in the Kodesh HaKodashim for six full years.

After that, the Kohein Gadol decided that the time had come to bring the kid out and make it known that a branch of the Kingdom of David had survived. With great joy, the nation crowned him king. They fell upon Queen Atalya and killed her. The boy grew up and became the king.

At first, he ruled as he should have. But slowly, his advisors convinced him that he was a god. They said to him, "The Kodesh HaKodashim is a place that only the Kohein Gadol can enter once a year, on Yom Kippur, and even he needs G-d's Mercy to get out of there alive. Yet you hid there in that room for six years! Certainly you must be a god yourself!"

Nu? It's not too hard to convince a guy that he's G-d.

So Yoash created a statue that looked like him and brought it to the Beis Hamikdash area. It was on Yom Kippur on that day, and it was also Shabbos.

Yoash wanted to physically bring the statue onto the Beis Hamikdash grounds, but he met the Prophet Zecharyah at the entrance. (Zecharyah was not only a prophet but also a Kohein.) Zecharyah said to him, "There's no way I'm letting you bring that statue into the Beis Hamikdash. Over my dead body! You'll have to kill me before you succeed in doing that!"

King Yoash boiled with rage. He ordered for Zecharyah, who was the son of Yehodayah, the man who saved his life and protected him for six years, to be executed.

From that moment on, from the instant that blood was spilled in the Beis Hamikdash, something changed in the Beis Hamikdash. It would never be the same place again.

Essentially, it was at that moment that the Destruction began.

As Megilas Eichah, the Scroll of Lamentations (2:20), tells us, "If in G-d's Temple there is killed a Kohein and a Navi..." And Rashi explains, "The Divine Spirit responds, 'Is it fine to you that you killed Zecharyah?!' "

In other words, the reason for the Destruction began with the murder of Zecharyah.

And this brings us back to Ground Zero, and the “Ground Zero Mosque.”

The murder of Zecharyah on the very grounds of the Beis Hamikdash teaches us that, to Jews, a place where the lives of thousands of people were snuffed out is no place for prayer.

It may be a resting place, a place for a memorial, a place to come and reflect, a place to honor the dead and perhaps even feel close to G-d—but not a place to build an organized, officially designated house of worship. At least not on Ground Zero itself. A block or two away? Maybe. That’s another discussion.

So what indeed are the criteria for a house of prayer?

As the Rebbe explains in one of his talks, this is the meaning of the verse, “Which house shall they build for me? And what is the place of My repose?” Where is it possible to build a house for G-d? This is specifically “the place of My repose”—a place without fights and without arguments, a place of Ahavas Yisroel (love of fellow Jew).

And so while Ground Zero is no place for a house of prayer, and its immediate vicinity may or may not be a place for a house of prayer, we as Jews know what is a place for a house of prayer: A place where peace always reigned. A place where no metal, no weapons of war, ever held sway. A place where peace and serenity and love reign supreme.

**A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE**

The author is solely responsible for the contents of this document.

Sponsored by Shimon Aron & Devorah Leah Rosenfeld & Family  
In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman אה אביר פנחס ז"ל  
who loved and supported Torah learning.