

The various ornamentations have raised many questions among rabbinical scholars regarding their permissibility. Among them: (1) If a verse containing the name of Hashem is painted on the wall, may the wall be painted over inasmuch as the name will be destroyed? (2) Pictures tend to distract (3) May lions and other zodiacal signs be shaped? (4) Trees were not planted around the mizbayach, why then can we plant them around the synagogue which is symbolic of the Temple?

In answer to these questions many views have been expressed, and conceptions in use of such adornments have been made. Most rabbis agree that while verses may be inscribed, those with the name of Hashem should not. Pictures and designs should be formed above the head level so that they do not distract. The lions are only partial figures and as such permissible. The synagogue differs from the mizbayach and we may have trees. In some synagogues there are no paintings or decorations due to the many views. Sometimes the Ten Commandments, too, is removed so as not to give the impression that this part of the Torah is greater than another part. Most rabbis however agree that since only one or two words of each commandment are inscribed there is no such implication.

CHAPTER II — *The Mechitza*

It is generally acknowledged that a most important part of prayer is sincerity and purity of thought. We have shown in the previous chapter that the synagogue is structured to enhance the kavana of the Jew. To maintain pure thoughts when one communicates with G-d the Torah ordained the mechitza which separates the men's section from the women's. There are three views among our rabbis as to the nature of the mechitza.

1. Some maintain that it serves two purposes; avoiding mingling of the sexes and obstructing the view of men so that they may not gaze at women during prayer (which in turn creates light-headedness). To accomplish both objectives the partition is constructed about 70 in. high. This view has been accepted in Chasidic circles and many others.

2. A second view states that the function of the mechitza is not to prevent gazing but just to avoid mixing. As a result the height of the partition is 54-60 inches or shoulder height — for such a wall is difficult to talk over.

3. Some rabbis say that a forty inch partition which is considered a wall regarding the Sabbath is sufficient as a partition.

Many synagogues have accepted the second type of mechitza, while some Orthodox congregations where difficulty is encountered in establishing a shoulder height mechitza have made use of the third kind of mechitza.