

The Talmud points out that the synagogue may be sold for anything but the following five; a bath-house, a laundry, a tannery, a toilet and a church. The first four are not in line with the dignity of the former synagogue. Although there are some rabbis who say that when the synagogue is sold by a committee as explained above, it may be sold even for one of these first four, most agree that an agreement should be made (as part of the contract) that it not be used for any of the four. All rabbis agree that the synagogue not be sold for later use as a church, nor to a broker who in all likelihood will sell it for a church. The reason for this last prohibition is threefold. One may not have any benefit from a church; in this case the funds. One may not bring comfort to a church, in this case acquisition of the building. One is not to place an obstacle in the path of the blind, which in this case refers to the selling of a building for religious acts which are prohibited, since the gentiles are commanded not to engage in idolatry. Although they do not conform to this law, we are not permitted to aid them in their transgression.

The monies received from the sale of the synagogue should be used to build another synagogue in a better area. If this is not practical, then it is best that the monies be distributed to help maintain other synagogues and houses of learning such as yeshivos. Many rabbis are of the opinion that once the synagogue has been formerly sold as explained above, the monies may halachically be distributed among the members. However, it is best to use it for charitable purposes.

(b) The Torahs

The sifrei torah of the synagogue should be given to other synagogues or they may be sold and the money of the sale distributed to one of three causes; perpetuate Torah learning; to help rescue Jews in captivity (behind the iron curtain), or to facilitate the wedding of orphans. Special attention must be given to Torahs donated by individuals for many have retained their ownership. Those Torah scrolls no longer suitable for use and beyond repair must be buried in an earthenware case or in a wooden box, and buried in the ground. This also applies to old chumashim and sidurim, which are placed in burlap bags and placed in a grave which is lined with boards on all four sides. The burial site may be a plot in the cemetery or in the backyard of the synagogue. In some countries a sign is placed at the foot of this plot indicating that religious articles have been buried there.

(c) The Furniture

As we explained earlier, synagogue furniture falls into two categories. Those serving holy items like the sefer torah which are classified as tashmishei kdusha, and synagogue furniture such as the amud, pews, bimah etc. Those in the first category need burial just as the sefer torah itself would, were it no longer usable.