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Home Sweet Home

By: Rabbi Eli Mozes (Originally Published 2016)

What is the difference between a house and a home? I found this question posed to the online editor of Merriam-Webster by one Hamza of Pakistan. Now, one might think that the definition of home is the place where you unwind, the location of your bed and fridge. It would appear, however, that the reality is otherwise.

Hyatt Hotels has a brand of lodgings called Hyatt House. The idea behind Hyatt House is to offer all of the amenities and furnishings of an apartment. Yet, nobody would ever call a Hyatt House suite "home." Although the Hyatt House suite may be identical to the traveler's bachelor pad, the former is appropriately named a house while the latter is "home."

Back to Merriam-Webster. The editor replied, "The main difference between them is that "house" is concrete. House refers to a building in which someone lives. In contrast, a home can refer either to a building or to any location that a person thinks of as the place where she lives and that belongs to her (emphasis added)." Based on the opinion of the Merriam-Webster online editor, were we to sum up the definition of home in two words, it would be "my space." This definition, while workable for many, is antithetical to the Torah way, as we will demonstrate.

The Talmud (Arachin 16a) discusses the seven sins which are the cause for tzara'as, and their scriptural sources. The final one is tzarus ayin, stinginess. The source for this is from a verse in the Torah in regard to one who finds tzara'as in his house: "Then he, whom the house is his, shall come and inform the kohen (priest)." (Metzora 14:35) The Talmud infers from the words "whom the house is his" that one who dedicates his home to himself only will find his house stricken with tzara'as. In Tractate Yoma (11b) the Talmud spells out the punishment a bit more graphically: "One who doesn't want to lend out his items and says, 'I don't have (a requested item)' - Hashem will publicize (his stinginess) when he will have to empty out his house." The meaning of this is that before the kohen would come to the house to inspect the tzara'as, everything would first be removed from the house, lest the items inside become tamei (spiritually impure) due to the house being designated as afflicted. When all the items were placed outside, all would see that this person did, in fact, possess a lot more than he was willing to admit.

This may strike one as rather extreme. "Am I not entitled to my own space?" "Why can't I just donate some money to a soup kitchen - why must I open up my home to others?"

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) addresses this head-on in his commentary to the Chumash. He states, "The Halacha clearly shows that the tzara'as is not directed at the building per se, but, rather, addresses the personality of the building owner. What is afflicted by the tzara'as is not the house, but the home. The life of the individual as distinct from the life of the community - that is what is represented here by the house, and that is what is afflicted with the tzara'as".

With this, Rabbi Hirsch answers the question of the difference between a house and a home. House is a mere physical structure, while a home is a location where the owner manifests his personality. It may be true that one's personality may cause him to define "home" as "mine," but that is only a reflection of his selfish personality; this need not be the case in other situations.

Rabbi Hirsch goes on to explain the ills of the "mine" attitude: "He acts as though his house were meant exclusively for himself. He follows the ways of the Sodomites, conducting human relationships on the basis of strict rights. He says 'What I have is mine and what you have is yours.' He forgets that to tzedek (strict justice) must be added tzedakah (charity) - to the exclusiveness of rights must be added the inclusiveness of love. Only thus will the society become a Jewish national society, and will the private existence of each household within it be justified."

The Torah demands that at the very core of how we define our personality, in our home, it can't just be about me. If one spends six months poring over the blueprints for his dream home, without once giving a thought to how this home might benefit others, then the proper address for this "dream home" is 1 Main St., Sodom, Canaan.

As Rabbi Hirsch continues, "He must remember that selfishness is a justified motive only for organic life - for all stages of development in the vegetable and animal world. But man's right to a social existence begins with self-sacrifice, through which he gains eternal life. And in his home, too - in his private life - he must strive with unflinching energy and without selfish motives to reach the moral ideal of devotion to duty." Only then is it truly "Home Sweet Home."

Alumni Focus

Rabbi Eli Mozes

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Rabbi Mozes, teaching in Kollel, 2015

2013-2017

Years as a Denver
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PRESENT



Rabbi Mozes, teaching in 2023

REBBI

Yeshivas Toras Chaim
of Denver

Kollel Happenings



On Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the Kollel scholars elected to be tested by Rabbi Yosef Fund, Bochen BMG on hilchos muktza. Dancing celebrating the siyum on Muktza