



## HOLY SITES IN ISRAEL

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# Holy Synagogues of Israel

**Torah Tidbits is proud to present a new series of articles in the coming year about the magnificent and holy sites of Israel. This new addition to Torah Tidbits seeks to connect each of us even more deeply to the profound meaning of our people's return to the Land of Israel and bring us even closer to experiencing the *kedushat ha'aretz* in our daily lives.**

The synagogue is a central feature in Jewish communities worldwide, and has been for millennia. As someone who likes to travel, I make it a point to visit the local shul in my destination city, be it active or otherwise. Visiting a shul is one of the best ways there is to get to know a Jewish community, past and present. The details serve as puzzle pieces and help construct an image, telling the story of the local community. Is it large or small? How is it decorated? Where is its location within the city? Is it easily identifiable as a house of worship from the outside? What languages are present on the signage? The answers to these questions can help us gain insight into the Jewish world beyond the shul walls. Were there a lot of Jews in the area? Was the community affluent? Was the host country favorable towards the community?

Baruch Hashem, here in Israel, Jewish life is flourishing. While minyanim are plentiful and can be found almost anywhere, across Israel are some very special and unique buildings used for prayer, some quite grand in size. In Jerusalem alone, the Belz shul impressively greets travelers as they enter the city, the Great Synagogue looms large in the city center, and the newly renovated



Tiferet Yisrael will soon welcome people in the Old City, just down the street from the Churva and the Four Sephardic Synagogues. Another Jerusalem favorite of mine is Ohel Yitzack, also known as “Shomrei HaChomot,” located in the Old

City's Muslim quarter. Other examples exist all around the country. In Shiloh, a modern shul designed to look like the Mishkan, which once stood just below, is a must visit. In Akko, Or Torah, widely known as the "Tunsian shul", is covered from floor to ceiling in mosaic tiles depicting various scenes from Tanach and Jewish History as well as flora and fauna native to Eretz Yisrael. The mosaics were a labor of love by artisan Tzion Badash z'l, and took him over 50 years to create. Not far from there, in Akko, is the Ramchal's shul, a small but worthwhile stop located within the market.

In this series, we will be focusing on some of the dozens of ancient synagogues found around the country; shuls whose remains all hold clues as to what life was like for the Jews that prayed there. We

will visit locations that date back to the Roman and Byzantine periods. Some shuls were even in use while the second Beit Hamikdash still stood in its full glory. Others will help us discover what life was like in the following centuries, as Jews, reeling from the Temple's destruction, learned to adapt to their new reality and pivot to a new, non-Temple-centric religious life. Along the way, as we peel back the layers and share stories of communities and worshippers of the past, we can internalize the messages, allowing them to inspire our own tefillah and avodat Hashem today. ■

**Rivi Frankel** is a sought after licensed tour guide in Israel for groups, families, and individuals of all ages. She is a Tanach lecturer, has run educational programming around the world, and currently lives in Jerusalem.



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