

## INTRODUCTION

It is widely assumed that the synagogue's main function is to serve as an alternative to the Holy Temple as a place in which God may be worshipped. However, as the Temple, the synagogue also serves as a place where Jews meet together. This meeting has not always been a calm one. At times, the gathering in the synagogue could serve as a focus for arguments and bitter disagreements. These disagreements highlighted the great difference between the Temple and the synagogue. A disagreement in the Temple had to find a resolution. There was no place to worship God other than the Temple on Mount Moriah. Anybody who abandoned the Temple or sought to find another place to worship God was a separatist. But the individual synagogue was never unique. Anybody could leave a particular synagogue and establish a new one, maintaining that his synagogue was the only place where God was being worshipped properly.

The synagogue should also serve as a gathering place for researches in the field of Judaic studies. Many people are researching various aspects of synagogue life. The most prominent researches about the synagogue are those carried out in the fields of archaeology and architecture. However, many other aspects of the synagogue are also subjects of research. Among the more obvious ones are the study of prayer itself and the synagogal poetry which is so much a part of prayer. Synagogue music, synagogue art and other aspects of synagogue life clearly have something in common. However, there is no gathering place for people who are interested in these particular subjects to meet each other. The present situation is analogous to the synagogue of Alexandria which had separate seating areas for people of each trade, but no common meeting place where they could learn one from another.

In order to create such a gathering place, a group of scholars from various fields got together and decided to create a new forum dedicated to synagogue life. We intend this forum to be an interdisciplinary meeting place. We proudly present the first fruit of our efforts, a collection of

articles which focusses mostly on prayer itself. We hope that we will be able to produce future volumes which will include a broader scope of papers on the various aspects of synagogue life: art and architecture, music and poetry, history and sociology. It is appropriate to introduce a volume dedicated to synagogue life with a prayer that it may make a contribution to the understanding of the significance of the synagogue in the life and history of the Jewish people.

*J. Tabory*