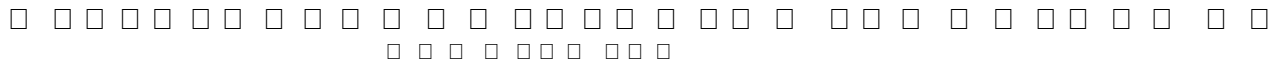


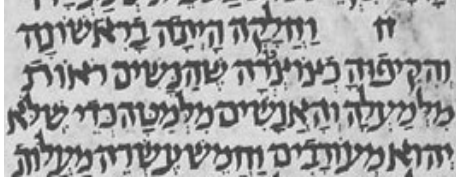
The Family That Prays Together - The Mechitzah in Historical & Archaeological Perspective



1) Women in the Synagogue

Acts 16.13 (ca. late 1 st century CE)	Tosefta 3.11 (mid-late 3 rd century CE)
On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a synagogue (προσευχήν). We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.	<p>והכל עולין למנין שבעה אפי' אשה אפי' קטן אין מביאין את האשה לקרות לרבים</p> <p>...And all count towards the seven [aliyyot to the Torah] even a woman [and] even a minor. We do not bring a woman to read for the many.</p>

2) Sources for Separation?

Philo, <i>On the Contemplative Life</i> 32-33 (turn of the era)	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i> 15.460 (93/94 CE)
And this common holy place to which they all come together on the seventh day is a twofold circuit, being separated partly into the apartment of the men, and partly into a chamber for the women, for women also, from habit, form a part of the audience, having the same feelings of admiration as the men... (33) and the wall which is between the houses rises from the ground three or four cubits upwards, like a battlement, and the upper portion rises upwards to the roof without any opening, on two accounts; first of all, in order that the modesty which is so becoming to the female sex may be preserved, and secondly, that the women may be easily able to comprehend what is said being seated within earshot, since there is then nothing which can possibly intercept the voice of him who is speaking.	<p>Within this court was the sacred (court) which women were forbidden to enter, and still farther within was a third court into which only priests were permitted to go.</p>
	<p>Mishnah, <i>Midot</i> 2.8 (2.5) [MS Kaufman] (early 3rd century CE)</p>  <p>And originally it was smooth, but [later] they erected around it a balcony so that the women would look on from above while the men [would be] below, so that they should not be mixed.</p>
Luke 13.10-4 (ca. 70 CE)	
<p>10 On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, 11 and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 12 When Jesus saw her, he addressed [her] (προσεφώνησεν) and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” 13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. 14 Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.”</p>	

3) Archaeological Data

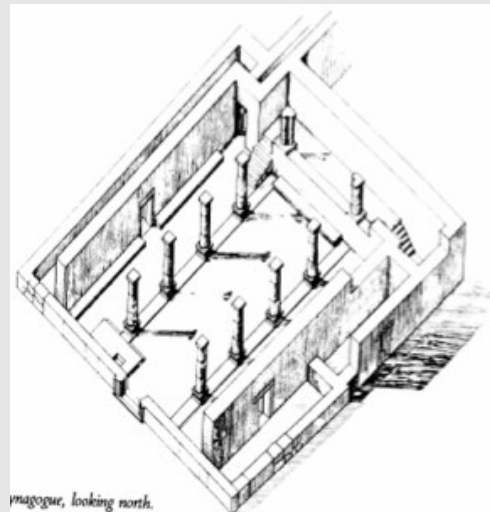
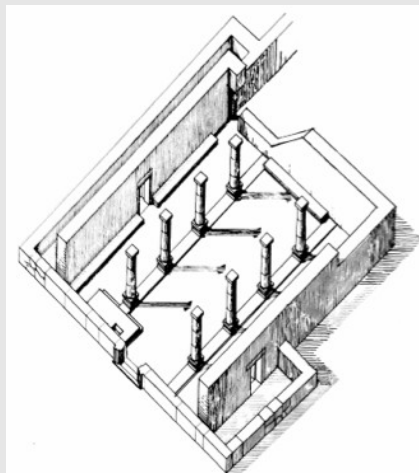
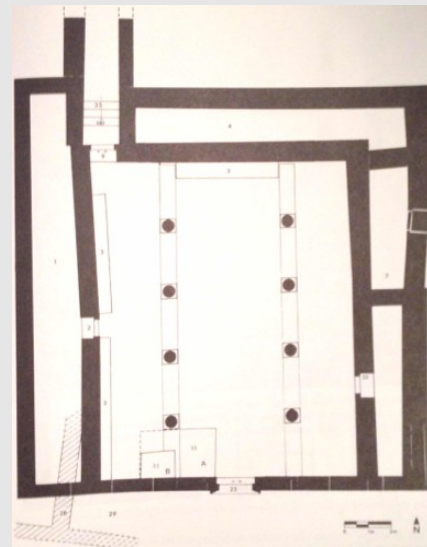
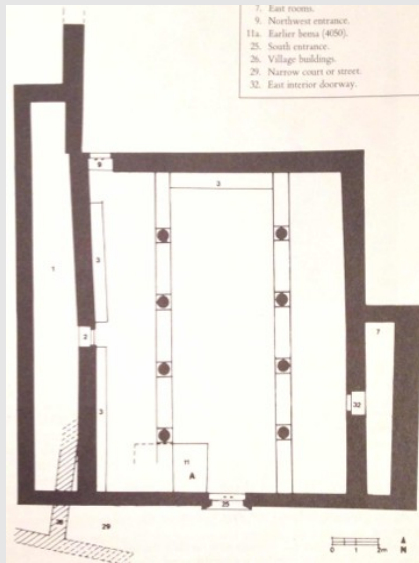
Gush Halav Synagogue Timeline

Period I – 250-306 CE (Middle to Late Roman Period)
 Period II – 306-363 CE (Late Roman Period)

Period III – 363-460 (Byzantine I)
 Period IV – 460-551 CE (Byzantine 2a)

Synagogue Period I (Meiron Excavation Project 5)

Synagogue Period II-IV (Meiron Excavation Project 5)



4) Separate Seating in Contemporary Pesak

R. Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986), *Iggerot Moshe*, OC 1.39

בהא דשאינא לבאר ענין המחיצה שצריך להיות בין אנשים לנשים בביהכ"נ וכמה הוא שיעור גובהה אליבא דהלכתא משום שיש מקומות במדינתנו זו שהתחילו לפרוץ בענין המחיצה שבין אנשים לנשים בביהכ"נ שנשאר לנו למקדש מעט ואפשר שאין חשודים שיעברו אדינא אלא מחסרון ידיעת חומר האיסור ולכן רוצה כתר"ה שאבאר מקור הדין וחומר האיסור ושיעור גובה המחוייב. והנה עצם הדין שאף אם האנשים הם בצד אחד והנשים בצד אחר אסורין הן להיות בלא מחיצה הוא לע"ד דינא דאורייתא

With respect to that which you ask to clarify according to the *halacha* the matter of the *mehitza* that is required to be between men and women in the synagogue and its requisite height because there are places in this country of ours that have begun to violate [the law] with respect to the *mehitza*... And behold the fundamental law [that] even if the men are on one side and the women are on the other, it is prohibited for them to be without a *mehitza*, seems according to my humble opinion to be a Biblical law.