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בס"ד

Stop the Talking in Shul!

The *Shulchan Aruch* states (*Orach Chaim* 124:7) that when a person talks in the synagogue during *chazaras hashatz* while the *chazzan* is repeating the Shemoneh Esrei, it is such a grave transgression that "*gadol avono mi'neso*, his sin is too great to bear." In other words, his sin is too great to be forgiven, a burden too heavy for God to carry, so to speak.

Nowhere else in the *Shulchan Aruch* does this harsh expression appear, even with regard to the gravest sins. The only place where we find this expression is in the Torah (*Genesis* 4:13), where it appears as a question rather than a statement. Cain has just killed Abel, and God has confronted him with his crime. And Cain says to God, "Is my sin too great to bear?" And God did indeed forgive him. Killing his brother was apparently not a "sin too great to bear." Yet talking in the synagogue during *chazaras hashatz* is too great to bear? How can such a thing be?

Some three hundred and fifty years ago, the Jewish population of Eastern Europe was devastated by Cossack pogroms for two years. These years came to be known as *Tach* (5408/1648) and *Tat* (5409/1649). We do not know for certain how many Jews died in these horrible massacres. Some estimates run as high as the hundreds of thousands. Afterwards, Rav Yom Tov Lippmann Heller, known as the Tosefos Yom Tov, had a dream in which he was told that the reason this calamity befell the Jewish people is that people used to talk in the synagogue during *chazaras hashatz*. He made a great public tumult about it in an attempt to get people to stop doing it. In fact, some *sidurim* have a special *Mi Shebeirach* prayer for those that do not talk in the synagogue during *chazaras hashatz*. It dates from the time of the Tosefos Yom Tov.

How can we understand such a thing? How can it be that so many thousands of people perished because of the sin of talking in the synagogue during *chazaras hashatz*?

Without question, the problem here is not the seriousness of the sin. Talking in the synagogue during *chazaras hashatz* is cer-

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