

We learn to work

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Haifa is a major city in Israel, which lies between mt. Carmel and the Mediterranean sea. Hadar is one of the more interesting neighborhoods in the city, much thanks to its population diversity, due to it being right in between the upper and lower city. The neighborhood used to be popular and central, but today is known mostly for its diversity and high crime rates.

In it, lies the Talpiot Market - and the structure that used to host it - which now stands almost empty. The market runs through the adjacent streets, and part of it takes place in the structure's basement.

The structure, originally designed by architect Moshe Gerstell, used to be the center of the city and pride of the local production, but now stands empty of use, though full of potential - just like the neighborhood. The structure is designed with unique features, that somewhat remind one of spiritual and religious structures - perhaps by shape, perhaps by light. These features brought us to compare between spiritual structures and this one, and ask: What makes a place spiritual? and more importantly - How can these spiritual values be used to restore the structure?

Walking through the neighbourhood gave us the slightest idea - we couldn't help but notice that the area is populated by many Jewish religious people, most of them coming from the radical Haredi world.

When moving on to research, we understood how right we were - the Haredi families make 42% of the neighbourhood's population. One must understand the meaning of these numbers. Haredi males, in most cases, aren't recruited to the army and don't work for the better part of their lives. Instead, they spend most of their time in prayer and religious studies. In their perception, that is the purpose of life.

Therefore, 62% of Haredi males in the neighbourhood are unemployed, and sponsored by the government in order to be able to maintain their religious practice. This practice usually takes place in the Jewish hall of studies - the Bet Midrash (in Hebrew: "Beit Hamidrash" = the house of commentary).

By interviewing a few Haredis, we were able to understand that their fear is not of working per se, but that working will lead to neglect in Bible studies, and to an inferior status at work in comparison to the Bet Midrash. In addition, they fear that a working environment could lead to unmodest situations, that would eventually lead to the working individuals being condemned by the Haredi society.

We propose a place that will harness the spiritual values, and allow them to make this society feel comfortable with a working environment. We believe that integrating religious and science studies, alongside a working environment, would allow these Haredi males to participate in the working circle without having to be pulled out of their spiritual life.

In macro, we see the structure as a generator that would allow these men to work on their own terms, and perhaps later even prepare them for working independently too.

Studying work spaces, we have found that the high-tech world has a lot in common with the Bet Midrash, or more correctly takes a lot from the Bet Midrash. Both based on large open spaces, and

rather than division into offices, enable an environment that encourages interaction - both based on the benefits of collaboration. What might be called a team in high tech, would be called 'Hevruta' in the religious world - a word that means both "together" and "friendship". In a Hevruta, as well as in high tech, tutoring is strongly dependent on informal sharing of knowledge.

The Bet midrash (or the Hall of studies), as mentioned, is where Haredi men spend most of their day. This is usually an open space with shared seating and room for many religious books. Studying is divided into three 4-hour segments, with short breaks in between for food and rest. The Bet midrash - in contrast from the synagogue - is made particularly for religious studies, and therefore is designed for men only - to avoid distraction, as is custom in the Haredi world. We see this crucial issue as the only way to encourage these males to work.

Books are the most essential objects In jewish tradition. Therefore, we chose bookshelves as our generating principle. It was crucial to understand what bookshelves can or can not do. Following this understanding, a continuous bookshelf system was designed as the center of the new program - thus able to assemble furniture such as a table or a bench, but also structural systems such as the main ramp - all made of bookshelves. Then, Three basic Working Modules were designed, all conserving the hevruta principles and the jewish atmosphere, allowing room for as many books as needed.

Generally, the structure itself was barely touched - all changes were made in wood, conserving the old concrete structure, distinguishing the old from the new. Strategically, every new seperation is made of bookshelves. The entrance, for instance, was visually separated by bookshelves, to allow a sterile and undisturbed environment. Surrounding The Bet Midrash, are separate food courts for meat and milk, and smaller spaces for studying or resting.

The Bet Midrash - the heart of the project - is the space created between the holy ark, the ramp, the bleachers and a few regular bookshelves. Even the holy Ark is built by the same language and means. Seating would be towards the ark for prayer, and towards the center to allow for a lecture or shared learning to take place. A special detail was designed to enhance the constructive features of the building - a wooden lighting object which highlights the concrete columns.

Down in the basement, lies the Mikve - a cleansing pool serving the users, receiving natural light through the half transparent floor. This serves the users as part of their everyday cleansing ritual. The Mikve is also designed with bookshelves, this time using as lockers and shelves for storing personal objects and clothes. The Mikve was separated entirely from the market, allowing the users the intimacy they need.

The market was left as it is in the first basement floor, since it seems to be functioning well. The roof terrace can be used by the workers for breaks - taking advantage of fresh air and wonderful views, but also for religious practice which must happen outside. Vertical movement within the main space happens through the wooden ramp. The gradual circulation reflects the process one goes through the building - learning a profession, acquiring it, and becoming an independent worker.

The Bet Midrash is the center of all happenings in the structure, and can be viewed from most of the spaces that surround it.

Additionally, it receives natural light which emphasizes the spiritual and central place that it is.

Upstairs, lie the working spaces - offering a Bet Midrash-like environment, and direct contact with both traditional books and the sound of religious studies from the bet midrash.

The lounge is placed near the working spaces, and serves the workers at breaks, as learned from the high tech world. This dynamic space allows a connection between work and religious lifestyle, by maintaining both physical and intellectual connections between the two.

In the working area, a special leg module was designed, one able to wire electricity, for the benefit of the workers. In addition, another module was designed to contain a sink with proper drainage through the hollow leg.

In the lounge, bookshelves were designed as comfortable seating places, allowing the workers the option of available religious books during breaks.

In this design, The workers will not be pulled out of their natural environment, but rather will experience a slight transformation within it, allowing them to work without losing the benefits of available Religious practice, and moreover - allowing the convenience of maintaining their religious lifestyle - such as their need in close hand washing sinks or kosher food separation - all in reach of hand within the structure itself.

As we see it, this model can be applied to any secluded or secluding society in the world, thus providing them a convenient working space, not by changing their environment, but rather expanding it - using its benefits to enhance their own working options.

We hope that by reducing the differences between the different societies, they might be able to overcome inner disputes, and be further integrated and accepted.