

Entering Synagogue — Open or Closed?

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

How do we walk into synagogue?

Too often we enter in a state of defensiveness *and* predation: we are both fearful for ourselves and ready to judge the dress, the conduct, and the company of others. Our dismissals are at the ready, firing as soon as the baby cries or the hosiery runs or the congregant behind us loudly whispers. God is little on our minds, since thoughts of God exist uneasily with focus on social hierarchy. Once we have ranked and settled, perhaps we can pray.

Still, when we are inspired or driven by need, the synagogue unfolds to us and opens its possibilities. Here is a quiet place where the presence of others does not prevent us from exploring ourselves. Here is a chance to lift one's voice, not at a sporting event or contest, but in sacred space. Here there is no rooting, except ultimately, for each other and for oneself.

Peace, as the poet told us, comes dropping slow. Try walking into the synagogue gradually shedding, step by step, the worry of public appearance, the necessity to rise or fall in the gauge of social standing. Come with an open heart and a yearning to speak to God.