

Off The Pulpit

October 22, 2015

Please see the bottom of Rabbi Wolpe's column for his prayer for Israel, and a link to "A Letter to Israelis."

It Takes a Minyan

Why do the central prayers of Judaism require a minyan, a quorum of ten? That is true of the Kedusha in the Amidah and the Kaddish, among others.

Such a central question has no single answer. One response is that human beings are in God's image, and for some experiences you require as many images of God around you as possible — for comfort, and sometimes for inspiration. Another answer is that Judaism emphasizes community, and so wishes to ensure that Jews will always seek out community, since there will always be a need for prayer.

In addition there is an important symbolic statement Judaism makes to each of us. There are many central tasks of life that can never be accomplished alone. It is not an issue of effort, or intelligence — the greatest scholar in Judaism may not recite the kedushah alone either. Rather the nature of God's world requires we do certain things together. Cooperation and community are not only comforts. You cannot be a full Jew alone on a mountaintop; to reach the heights you need others, pulling and pushing and climbing with you. God exists alone. For us, as the old saying goes — its takes a minyan.



El Maleh Rachamim -- Compassionate God,
We pray not to wipe out haters but to banish hatred.
Not to destroy sinners but to lessen sin.
Our prayers are not for a perfect world but a better one
Where parents are not bereaved by the savagery of sudden attacks
Or children orphaned by blades glinting in a noonday sun.
Help us dear God, to have the courage to remain strong, to stand fast.
Spread your light on the dark hearts of the slayers
And your comfort to the bereaved hearts of families of the slain.
Let calm return Your city Jerusalem, and to Israel, Your blessed land.
We grieve with those wounded in body and spirit,
Pray for the fortitude of our sisters and brothers,
And ask you to awaken the world to our struggle and help us bring peace.

A Letter to Israelis: We Are With You