

Religious Communities in Tragic Times



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The tragedies of the past weeks remind us why religious community matters:

1. In the face of death, religion maintains that life is meaningful. Not only because of the belief that human beings never fully disappear, but because it teaches that this pageant, with all its pain and anguish, need never resolve into despair. Life still matters; we always matter.

2. A religious community provides comfort and help. Long after others have forgotten, the congregation will be there, with everything from meals to a shoulder to a prayer.

3. God is called *Zochair Kol Hanishkachot* the One who remembers everything forgotten. In the community too, we read the *Yarzheit* notices years, sometimes decades later. We do not let the memory of those we love slip away.

4. The long tradition reminds us that others have suffered and endured before us. The bereaved can turn to Job and Ecclesiastes for theology and wisdom; to Aaron and David and Sarah and Naomi for the companionship of those who have lost; to the Rabbis for endless, anguished and deep reflections on the fleetingness of life, the meaning of faith, and the promise that is the leitmotif of religious life.

Nothing erases pain; nothing wipes away loss. But a *kehilla kedosha*, a sacred community, is the beginning of healing our hearts.