

From the Desk of Rabbi Gold



A cynic once explained the difference between an unaffiliated Jew and a Jew who is affiliated with a Synagogue as follows: One stays away from all Synagogues, and the other stays away from one specific Synagogue.

Why does a Jew join a Synagogue? Was the cynic right? Is it only so that he may determine the Synagogue from which to stay away?

Synagogue membership is a voluntary act. We have no coercive power to force Jews to affiliate with Synagogues. If they do decide to join a Synagogue, it is because membership fulfills a need for themselves and for the family.

What needs does the Synagogue fulfill? There are those who will deprecate the motives of Jews who join Synagogues by saying that it is largely the expression of a social need. I do not make light of this reason for joining. Indeed, one of the traditional names for the Synagogue is, "Beis Haknesses," the House of Assembly. The Synagogue should serve as a means of bringing people together and should transform geographic proximity into a genuine community. It is a source of gratification that T.B.S. has served through the years as the catalytic agent which brought people together and enabled them to form lifelong friendships.

There are those who join the Synagogue because their children need a religious upbringing. Certainly it is a fine motive and we ought not to condemn it. Rather, we should encourage it. Let parents first join for the sake of their children. They, themselves, will soon follow, for they will learn that a child will never accept values which hold no meaning for the parents. The best way to make a child come to Synagogue is by bringing him.

There are quite a few who join the Synagogue because it is a community institution and as such they feel that it needs to be supported. They may not need the Synagogue, they think, but others do. We ought not to disparage this kind of motivation. A Jew who feels responsible enough to provide for a community need, to provide for others that which he himself thinks he can do without, will eventually be led to identify with the Synagogue on a personal basis. To be one's brother's brother is the highest form of the religious ideal.

There are those who join the Synagogue because they have a vague and unformulated desire to identify with something. They want to feel they stand for certain things and that life holds some meaning for them. They don't join the Synagogue so much because they are clear about the commitment that they make, but rather because not being members gives them an uneasy feeling of committing a sin of omission.

Whatever the reason may be that prompts you to join, we know that your membership will open the door to rich religious, cultural, social and recreational activities. We hope that you will seize this opportunity and through active participation discover that while the first step towards membership may be peripheral, it will lead to a fulfillment of the cravings which all of us have for an ideal to inspire and a cause to serve.

Dear Friends: One of the beautiful customs of our people is the annual remembrance of dear ones and friends through memorial contributions made during the High Holy Days. In reverence to our departed, we shall once again compile a Book of Memory containing the names of relatives and friends whom we wish to remember.

Your contribution helps to advance the religious, educational, cultural and social programs of Temple Beth Shalom. These programs for both young and old are a living memorial to your beloved ones.

Please accept my heartfelt good wishes for the coming New Year, and for your generosity in making this Book of Memory possible. With personal regards, Cordially,
RABBI AARON S. GOLD

This, too, it seems to me, is a good foundation upon which to build strong Synagogue loyalties. A Jew who somehow doesn't feel at ease when he doesn't belong to a Synagogue will eventually, after joining, discover that the Synagogue can give him the direction and meaning of life which he subconsciously misses.

WHY I GO TO TEMPLE To achieve emotional relaxation and spiritual exhilaration by insulating myself through meditation against clamor and clutter of my daily routine. To give audible expression to my resolve to attain the maximum unfoldment of my better self. To strengthen my determination to accept gracefully the fact of the impermanence of the individual and to replenish my confidence that because each of us is a link in the never ending chain of time each of us has within him a spark of eternity.

To ask for divine help to pattern my life on the principle that life has a meaning and purpose and direction beyond human understanding. To pay my respects to my forefathers and to set an example to my offspring through the overt affirmation of my Jewishness by reason of my attendance at services.

To record my gratification that I belong to an ancient and honorable people dedicated to justice, learning, charity and sanctity. To acknowledge the indebtedness of our people to the synagogue for its ceaseless and dedicated efforts through its rabbis and lay leaders to clarify, codify and interpret Judaism, thereby assuring the physical, cultural and spiritual continuity of Jewry.

To avow my spiritual dependence on a supreme power outside of man, which, although I am unable scientifically to explain, I accept on faith and acknowledge as the guiding force of life in every form. To commune through prayers with this power, which in accord with the precepts of Judaism I regard as God - and the only God.

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