

From the Chair (Insert pic of chair)

How do you decide when to go to a service? For some it's easy, if it's Rosh Hashanah, it's time to go to shul! For others, you go if you have a mitzvah, or if you are on security (for some it appears you don't go if you are on security, but that's a subject for a separate column, and perhaps a separate diatribe...)

Some of us attend only if there is a special event. We might have trouble at the moment as we have had events every weekend, what with bar mitzvahs, our annual 'specials' such as Remembrance and Austerlitz shabbats, other regulars such as Cheder shabbat, as well as additional events suggested by our extremely dynamic student Rabbi Tanya Sakhnovich.

Another factor in deciding to attend consciously or unconsciously, is what our parents would have expected. For some of us it is something we follow, for others, something we rebel against. One of the things that frequently surprises me is how few people seem to have an expectation that they attend for major festivals. Shavuot and Sukkot were painfully poorly attended. Contrary perhaps to what some people would expect, my High Liberal upbringing included an expectation that we attended all festival services.

I never really took an opportunity to discuss with my parents why they went to shul. I do not think spirituality figured hugely for them, although I could be wrong. My mother I think had a straightforward belief in a personal God, but my father was much more of a rationalist. He saw the ethical aspects of Judaism as key, and I think would have viewed his attendance as part of a duty to sustain the community.

Only much later in my adulthood did I come across the idea of Reclaiming Judaism as a Spiritual Practice (the title of a book, I believe). This includes the notion that Shabbat and the festivals foster certain attitudes of mind, and that the sequence of festivals leads us through a sequence of modes of being that are beneficial for us to experience.

Shabbat of course, which we celebrate in diverse ways as Liberal Jews, is an opportunity for giving our spirits a rest from the frenetic pace of our stressful day-to-day lives. I vary in the degree to which I allow myself that experience, but usually find it a very positive one when I do...

Each festival too offers a specific experience that can teach us something. Tanya Sakhnovich will be with us for Shavuot, so watch out for announcements of opportunities to discover new meanings in that festival next summer.

Meanwhile.... why do you go to shul? And when?

Best wishes to all

Susan King  
November 2008