

Daily *Minyan*, A Portal to Warm, Harmonious Judaism

by Arnold Podgorsky

Each morning and evening, every day but Saturday, fellow congregants collect in the Miller Chapel for morning or evening services. Twice weekly this daily *minyan* service includes Torah reading. Every day, if we have a *minyan* (ten), services include *Kaddish* for mourners. Daily *minyan* services always include warmth, welcoming, friendship, joking, learning, and more.

I will not induce you to attend services or pray. Service attendance and, certainly, prayer are personal, often depending on how or whether we perceive God. I'll not ask you to come to *minyan*, but I will tell you why I attend when I can (for me in the morning). Four reasons with a wrap up. It should be an easy read.

First, humility. Washington is one heady town. Some maintain Texas-size egos just to make it through the day. *Minyan* points me toward humility—in my marriage, my friendships, with co-workers, with strangers I pass on the street, with the infirm. Humility I can use! I find it central in each reading and prayer—reminders to acknowledge our departure from *Mitzrayim*, gift the bride, come to *shul* “punctually.” However we may define God or the infinite, allusion to greatness, awesomeness, and timelessness puts our local strivings in welcome perspective.

Second, learning, in two ways. Prayer, for so long a dry mystery to me, became comprehensible and rich when I prayed frequently. Formal petitioning and medieval phrases took on meaning, but not because I developed comfort for scripted supplications or praise. Rather, frequent prayer refocused me, changing me in small ways. After decades of dismissing any notion that the Almighty would care about my praise (let alone benefit from it), I recognized that these prayers are for me! I see that prayers are not so much to change the Almighty's preferences, but to help me change my own events (and maybe those changes have impact beyond me). So I grow and learn from prayer—to be less subject to my own stilted logic, and to think about the connected, harmonious Oneness of everyone and everything. You don't want to think about it that way? Great! Have it your way! Whatever you may derive from it, frequent and focused recitation of the *Shema* and the prayers that frame it challenges us to define Oneness. One God to be sure (Abraham having won that battle), but also a unified, loving, harmonious everything else. Say these prayers often and you can't help but feel more warmly and affectionately toward everyone and everything around you. Such a coincidence that the Torah tells us to say the *Shema* twice daily!

I also learn as others stand up and teach: *d'var Torah*, *Pirkei Avot* commentary, discussion of Talmud or a Psalm. Sometimes lay, sometimes a Rabbi, always insightful and entertaining.

Third, Torah. Twice weekly, read within a small group. If you want you'll have an *aliyah*. Or *lehn*, or *magbiah*, or dress the Torah. Torah reading at *minyan* is physically intimate, informal, unintimidating, and quick. In fact, *minyan* moves with alacrity start to finish.

Fourth, giving back. I learned of *minyan* when my father died. Until then, the thought of showing up for prayer at 7:30 in the morning was less than a nonstarter. But I came to say *Kaddish* for Dad, because, as they say, the merit of the son reflects on the father (he didn't need that, but I did). I learned from others to mourn and end my mourning after eleven months with a smoked fish breakfast. I learned to wear *tefillin* (an entire subject itself), began restudying Hebrew, and, sensing the depth of *Kaddish* itself, read Leon Wieseltier's wonderful book of that same name. Now I am there for others, to add another hand to the welcome. We will all mourn

and mourn again. *Minyan* helped me learn parameters for grief. I saw how our customs and traditions establish a warm commonality within a mourning community. And then, after *Kaddish*, every morning, there are bagels, coffee, and *kibitzing*.

Finally, the wrap up. Nothing new here but a different perspective on what I've already said. Some mornings I wake up and hit the road for the office. I listen to CNBC, worry the about stock market, think about issues for my workday, make calls from the car. I am working before I arrive downtown and get on the elevator. Other mornings I awaken and go to Adas Israel, listen to the considered teachings of others, and devote an hour to humility, love, harmony, Torah, connectedness, coffee, and *kibitz*. The *minyan* visit makes for a more centered, happier, and more peaceful day.

The Daily Minyan meets Monday through Friday, at 7:30 am and 6:00 pm and on Sundays at 8:30 am and 6:00 pm.

Note: Arnold Podgorsky is treasurer of Adas Israel Congregation.