

Does God Attend Daily Minyan?

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The famous Hasidic Kotzker Rebbe commented that God comes where God is invited. In principle, God should be invited to every daily minyan in every synagogue throughout the world. Each worshiper should feel the presence of God when praying. The services should be conducted with love, devotion, piety...with a genuine desire to experience the Divine.

Very fortunate are those who attend daily minyan and who indeed invite God's presence...and feel God's presence. The spiritual uplift of sincere prayer is of inestimable value.

Regrettably, the daily minyan experience isn't always like this ideal model. Prayers are often recited quickly, by rote, without evoking much religious emotion. In some synagogues, even the rabbis don't attend daily services regularly; and when they do show up, it's usually late. And then rather than immerse in prayers, they are busy chatting or joking with congregants.

Some attend daily minyan because that's what Jews are supposed to do. It's part of their daily routine and is important to them. They are pleased to participate in services, chat with fellow congregants, maybe even have some refreshments after prayers. But whether God is at the center of their concern is a moot point. For many, they sincerely pray to God. For others, God isn't even on their minds!

Some years ago, my dear and respected friend, Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo, wrote an article about the "relocation" of God. Here is an excerpt from that article.

"Synagogues – whether Orthodox, Conservative or Reform – are no longer His primary residence. Surely some of the worshippers are pious people who try to communicate with their Creator, but overall, the majority of these places have become religiously sterile and spiritually empty. So God is moving to unconventional minyanim and places such as Israeli cafes, debating clubs, community centers, unaffiliated religious gatherings, and atypical batei midrash. The reason is obvious. In some of those places people are actually looking for Him. And that is what He loves; not those who have already found Him and take Him for granted."

While I believe Rabbi Cardozo's contention is over-stated, it contains deep truth. God has not abandoned synagogues that aspire to holiness, that raise our spirits and nourish our souls. God has not given up on the many pious Jews who sincerely pray in their daily minyanim. But Rabbi Cardozo touches on a serious dilemma...where synagogues don't seem to be inviting God's presence, don't

convey a sense of religious yearning and solemnity. If God isn't experienced in the daily minyan, it means God isn't really invited. And if God isn't invited, daily minyan loses its *raison d'être*.

The daily minyan, for many, is a spiritual anchor of their lives. They pray quietly, meditatively. They avoid chatter or frivolity in the sanctuary. They conduct themselves as though they are in the presence of God. *Ashrei Yoshevei Veitekha*...happy are those who dwell in Your house...a house where You are not only invited but are the Host.