

FROM THE RABBI

One of Judaism's greatest gifts to us is the spiritual practice of daily prayer. Just a few minutes is all it takes to orient our hearts and minds to who we are and what is most important. It is an experience of grounding, connecting us to the Source of all Life and to our people's sacred journey.

I know — inviting as this may sound, I realize that our contemporary American lifestyles may not easily lend themselves to the discipline of daily prayer, especially at set times, as is the daily minyan schedule. I also recognize that many of us don't know the words and melodies, their power as if hidden behind a thick curtain. If only we had had the opportunities for immersive prayer experiences, acquiring the tools to feel comfortable and motivated to attend minyan with our community. While some of our members have had that experience, many of us have not. We may frequently offer educational opportunities to learn this, but it takes time.

Yet even for those who have had that background and knowledge, we live busy lives that may take us away from consciously planning to attend our Ohavi Zedek daily minyan service. What was once a core part of the life of our congregation is more difficult to maintain these days. It is my wish that we can revisit this.

As it turns out, the daily minyan is much more than a chance for personal prayer. It is a gathering place – even while virtual. When I log onto the minyan on Zoom, it gives me such joy to see the faces and hear the voices of our OZ members, and guests as well. We get to schmooze with each other more than usual in those moments, and the value of those connections during our pandemic isolation is immeasurable. I am smiling as I am thinking about it.

Our daily minyan has also become an important spiritual tool for us to recite healing prayers, whether for our loved ones, or for the world, during a time of so much suffering and illness. Many nights have seen OZ members expressing their worries and fears for those in need of healing. It is a deeply personal yet also communal time to put those worries into healing prayers which offer an important salve for our pained hearts.

But even more – **the daily minyan serves an essential purpose for many of our members who have lost family members.** We have supported each other through *shiva*, giving those in mourning a chance to say mourners' *kaddish* and share memories and feelings.

Being able to observe *yahrzeit*, reciting *kaddish* on the anniversary (on the Jewish calendar) of our loved ones' passing is extremely meaningful. We always pause for those saying *kaddish* for a loved ones' *yahrzeit* to share memories of the loved one whom they are remembering.

This is where **community** is so essential – Jewish law and practice requires a *minyan* of ten Jews (from age 13) for *kaddish* to be recited. Our ancestors developed this system out of an understanding that some spiritual practice requires community for it to ascend and be real. We need each other for this practice. For those of us who do remember loves and recite *kaddish*, it is extremely important and meaningful that our community gathers for *minyan* as a way to support each other. It is up to our community to rally for each other – if for no other reason, we need to make sure we have a *minyan* each day.

Yes, we do have a core group of members who attend periodically or regularly, some because they value the spiritual practice of prayer, but most because they choose to be there for others who need a minyan. But the **numbers of OZ members who are regulars for minyan is insufficient for our needs.**

(Evening minyan is Sunday-Thursday at 7 pm.) For this reason, I ask: **how about we each try our best to set aside times on our schedules when we can commit to attend?** It would mean a world of difference for our community! And be a gift to our friends in our OZ community who need us.

It is also gift to each of us in performing this *mitzvah* – in community gathering, friendship and support! I look forward to seeing you! (Minyan times and links are on our calendar and “Upcoming Events” page on our website.)

~ Rabbi Amy Small
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