

## A Thought For Shabbat

### Shabbat Shalom

This week, just the briefest of messages for Shabbat. I hope so much that you are all doing well, and I daven for the health, welfare, peace of mind of the entire community and they we may all be back together again, with each other and with loved ones that we miss so much.

At the end of another week without shul - and no realistic prospect of being back in shul in the coming few weeks, I think about one of the opening verses of our Parsha - Achrei Mot, that describes the role and rituals of the High Priest in the Temple on Yom Kippur.

Hashem tells Moshe

דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן אַחִיךָ וְאַל־יָבֹא בְּכָל־עֵת אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ

Tell your brother Aaron 'do not come into the holy place at all times'

The Jewish people have spent a year laboring to build the most beautiful Sanctuary for Hashem. At the heart of it is the Holy of Holies, that contains the most important and symbolic of all of the items in the Temple - the Aron Kodesh, containing the Tablets of the 10 commandments, topped by the Keruvim - angelic, gold angel like figures.

We think - perhaps we took for granted - that holy spaces are readily accessible. The calling card of our shul is "Shalom Shalom" - Welcome, we are open - come, as often as you like.

Suddenly that's not true anymore. And, to speak personally, that is very hard for me, and I know for many other people too. And although the community continues to show dazzlingly inspirational acts of kindness, unanticipated ways of commemorating - as we saw this week - Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut. But still we question. Why would G-d not want me to go to shul?

Sometimes, it seems the answer from our Parsha is - that the very sanctity, the Kedusha of a place is defined by how much we yearn for it.

Last year, on Yom Kippur, I tried to apply the verses of our parsha - how the high priest would go around the Temple on Yom Kippur and make 'atonement' purify the altars, the Table etc - for sins of omission and commission, inattentiveness, failure to appreciate the sanctity and the Fear of G-d with which one is supposed to conduct oneself in these holy places. And I challenged people to imagine what a High Priest would need to 'atone' for in shul - the pews - with too much talking (!) - the Aron - where we keep the Torah, but fail to heed it's words. The Bimah, where the chazan stands and directs our prayer, that we utter, all too often without sincerity or belief.

Thinking back about that sermon, I comfort myself. Our absence from Shul is temporary. We will be back - and as back as soon as it is safe to do so. Please don't doubt this, not for a second.

But when we do come back - we will come back changed. Will any of us take shul for granted? Will we come, just to be social? All of us have changed tremendously from these awful times. We don't take anything - even Hashem - for granted.

Shul will always be a place of community - for coming with people, and to meet people. But it will be much, much more than that. It will be a place for sincere prayer. It will be a place where we can meet our spiritual needs. Where we can speak honestly - tearfully - to G-d in His house. Where we can find comfort for our souls. The reassurance, as we hear timeless, eternal words, ancient and traditional tunes - that we have seen truly difficult times before. And when we are lost, we can find strength, reassurance in the sublime and the timeless.

I wish you all Shabbat Shalom, health, peace of mind, and hope to see you ALL very soon!

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