



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

What to Bring to Shule

This could be a plea to congregants and visitors not to bring mobile phones to shule.

Not only does it break the laws of Shabbat, but can't you live without your mobile? Are you afraid that the world will come to an end if you can't remain in touch?

As I say, this could have been a plea to leave mobiles at home. But that is not quite the point I want to make.

Instead I want to comment on a verse in the sidra. "With this shall Aharon come into the sanctuary", says the Torah (Vayikra 16:3).

The Hebrew B'ZOT - "with this" - has an interesting gimatriya; the letters of ZOT add up to 408, which in turn is the total of three other words, TZOM, KOL, MAMON - "fasting, prayer and charity", each of which adds up to 136.

Those who worked this out had a message for the people of Aharon in every generation, that what they should bring to the sanctuary was a sincere, repentant and generous heart (not a word about phones!).

Very interesting. You cannot come to shule empty-handed.

But it is not material things you should bring. What you should bring is genuine spiritual preparation.

"Prepare to meet your God, O Israel", says Amos (4:12). Every special occasion requires preparation - Shabbat, Pesach, Rosh HaShana, Bar-Mitzva, marriage, death... and so does prayer.

The Psalmist asks (T'hilim 24), "Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord and who may stand in His holy place? He that has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not set his desire upon vanity or sworn deceitfully".

But what do you do if you have a mountain of mistakes on your back and are not sure God will accept your prayers?

Pray... that you may be able to pray, and that God may hearken to and help you.

The Holy Community

Synagogues often have names which tell you where the synagogue is located.

Perhaps illogically, the original name is sometimes maintained even when the synagogue has moved somewhere else.

Other synagogue names tell you the ideals which motivated the founders.

Examples are "Holy Congregation of Ohavei Shalom (Lovers of Peace)", "Holy Congregation of Emet V'Emunah (Truth and Faith)".

Note the opening phrase - K'HILA K'DOSHA, "Holy Congregation". Every synagogue incorporates these words in its name. It is not the synagogue building that is regarded as holy, but the congregation.

What makes a congregation holy? Its shared ethos, its values, its commitments, its hopes... above all, its unity.

When the Torah reading for this week says, V'AHAVTA L'REI'ACHA KAMOTHA, "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18), it doesn't just have in mind the person who lives next to you, but your family and friends and certainly the members of your shule.

The moment that dissension breaks out in the congregation, it can hardly be a holy congregation any more.

The guardian of the congregational holiness is the rabbi, and his constant concern must be the harmony of the human beings who make up his congregation. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH