

‘Collective worship is essential for the Orthodox Jew’. Do you agree? Give reasons to support your answer and show that you have thought about different points of view.

I agree with the statement that collective worship is essential for the orthodox Jew. My reasons for agreeing with this are the following. Firstly, Moses commanded a public reading of Torah. This is related to communal worship as a minyan, a group of 10 men over the age of Bar Mitzvah, must be present before a reading of the Torah can take place. A minyan is required for other important prayers, one of which is the mourners’ prayer, Kaddish. When someone has died, the mourners are obligated to recite this prayer each day for a specific period of time. In order to recite the prayer, they need a minyan, the quorum required for public prayer. The result is that the community assembles in their home while they are in mourning to enable the mourners to say Kaddish and thereby are able to provide support and consolation. Once the period of mourning is completed, seven days, then the mourners need to come to the synagogue to join the minyan there to say Kaddish. The result again is that they cannot isolate themselves in their grief, but must come back to the world and back to the community, where they will be supported and nurtured as they work through their grief.

Another reason that communal worship is essential is because most of the main traditions and festivals happen within the synagogue such as Bar Mitzvah and Yom Kippur. It also keeps a feeling of community within the faith because if you just did individual worship you would not get the feeling of community. Tradition is a good reason why as it ensures the thinking of god, having daily prayer in the synagogue and to pass on a sense of belonging. Some say that collective worship is very essential or else the faith would die out and without the set prayers and religious observances from the first temple, the sense of tradition and belonging would disappear. Also communal prayer expresses communally-held values and beliefs.

By praying as a community you have a sense of belonging. By worshipping God together you are doing it with a body of like-minded people. You gain an identity, a fellowship. You gain support and encouragement from other people around you and can share concerns and joys with them. You don’t feel alone. Communal worship is crucial; it is required to maintain historical traditions and to express ideas of

belonging and corporateness. Another reason would be to act as a witness to others and as a sign of the permanence of the faith, despite persecution. It is also a discipline and a chance to link up with fellow Jews worldwide who follow the same customs and traditions.

Communal prayer has greater worth than individual prayer. It has a greater impact and is more acceptable. The gathering of worshippers in the synagogue represents in miniature the whole Covenant Community standing before God. If a Jew does not pray as a community then they are not a complete Jew. Also praying as a community means not merely as a group of individuals within a community, but the community's prayer to God. After all, the covenant at Sinai was with the community as a collective unit. There is sanctity to the community that exceeds the sum of its parts.

Communal prayer: This includes the prayer of the members of a family together and the prayer meeting in the church where people can pray for each other. A believer must share with other believers about what concerns his inner and outer life because in this way we can encourage one another in seeking God. Honesty about sin and the sharing of sadness and joy produces good relationships among brothers which are like being in a family and are made holy by faith. The parents, sons and daughters in a family will be in a holy state if the family meets in the morning and at night to worship God. Believers must encourage their families to continue to have a relationship with God because if religion dies inside the family it will not be found anywhere else. It is the responsibility of the father to make his house a residence for God otherwise he cannot keep away evil spirits.

However I disagree with this statement for the following reasons. It isn't crucial for an Orthodox Jew to attend the synagogue for communal prayer. If a Jew doesn't go to the synagogue it will not make that person any less a Jew than someone who does go to the synagogue. A Jew who doesn't participate in communal worship will not be labelled as different to those that do. After all a person is born a Jew, so whether they take part in communal worship doesn't matter.

A reason why private prayer is important is that secrecy is important, because we are praying in front of God and not before men. Jesus set us an example for prayer. Many times Jesus isolated himself to pray and spent complete nights in prayer. A Jew should begin and end his day by prayer as it will enable him to enjoy a powerful spiritual life. Prayer to a believer is as important as food to the body.

Some may feel that the home is more important than the home is more important than the synagogue. This can be for a number of reasons. They may feel this because you don't need a synagogue to be able to get together and pray. It can be done at home as long as there is a minyan.

From the point of prayer the synagogue is not necessary and if you want to pray in private then the home could be more important than the synagogue. People believe that the home is more important than the synagogue because the home is where you learn a lot about Judaism, about keeping kosher, lighting candles on Friday night and other such mitzvot.

In many synagogues, members who attend the faith have to pay an annual rent for a seat in the synagogue. When a Jew pays this annual rent they are given an allocated seat in the synagogue. The closer the seat is to the bimah the more expensive it is, this relates to traditions in the past. This is a reason why some Jews who are not as wealthy don't believe that collective worship is essential as they are unable to afford a seat. The synagogue is very important to an orthodox Jew, it is important for them to study in it. Also it is important to keep things like mitzvot going to keep the sense of tradition and strengthen the faith.

To conclude I feel that both collective and private prayer are essential for the orthodox Jew. An example which includes both collective prayer and private prayer is the Amidah. The Amidah is a person's opportunity to approach God in private prayer, and should therefore be said quietly. The words must be audible to oneself, but one should be careful to pray softly enough not to disturb others. If one is alone, it is permissible to raise one's voice slightly if it helps concentration. It is forbidden to interrupt the Amidah even to greet an important person. One should not even acknowledge a greeting. Only a grave emergency justifies interrupting the Amidah, since it is considered a conversation with God.

Perhaps another reason Jews have a misconception about individual relationships with God is the traditional emphasis on praying in a Minyon. Judaism as a religion is not unique in placing an emphasis on praying as a community. There are numerous reasons for and advantages to gathering with others for communal prayer. What is important to realize is that finding God by yourself is "kosher" so to speak.

Even though Jews do not usually use the term "personal relationship" to describe God, we could since Judaism includes the concept. You need look no further than the silent meditation that is found in every Jewish service called the Amidah--the central part of the Jewish service. During the Amidah each of us has the opportunity for our own private thoughts, prayers, contemplations and meditations. For this reason, the Amidah is probably my favourite part of a Jewish service.

One may pray alone, but that cannot function as the mainstay in the life of a Jew. Jews need to come together to accomplish the many -faceted aspects of worship: prayer, study, celebration. All these things require the

presence of other people; all are enhanced by the presence of other people. Hence collective worship is very important indeed essential for Jews. In both issues, the communal prayer is superlative over praying alone. Of course, other factors come into play. Someone broken-heartedly praying outside their child's hospital room, speaking to God from the core of their being is still the superior prayer over one who might feel confined from fully expressing themselves in public. Certainly people can pray by themselves, but collective worship is also essential at regular intervals because it brings the community together and that is important. Judaism is not a religion of the individual. It is more than a faith. It is a family-centred and community-based culture and civilization. It fosters interdependence and relationships with others.