

Toldot: Chaverim Kol Yisrael

- Sanctity can only be created by all Israel together. Rabbi Uziel's pesak halacha on lo titgodedu, translated into Shabbat synagogue behavior.

TOLDOT: HAVERIM KOL YISRAEL

1. Haverim Kol Yisrael; Why? Because sanctity can only be created by all Israel together. That is why for Rosh Hodesh Benching, we use the Sefer Torah, representing Kelal Yisrael, three people stand there representing Sanhedrin, through Sanhedrin representatives of Kelal Yisrael. The Midrash about how the Angels asked the Almighty when is Rosh Hashanah, and He responded, ani veatem nered venishal lebet Din shel mata....

2. This is only possible when Kelal yisrael is together. The classic example of our people's unity is the twelve sons of Jacob, each with its own unique gifts and talents, and only when together forming the household of Israel, the Bet Yisrael. It was a unity very hard to achieve, as we know from the story of Joseph, which we read during the next few weeks. At Jacob's deathbed it was achieved, and it was his chief bequest and last will to his children, KOL ELE SHIVTE YISRAEL, SHNEYM ASAR.

3. Rabbi Ben Ziyon Meir Hai Uziel, past Sefardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, wrote a teshuvah in which he speaks out very strongly about those who split communities. The question was asked about whether a congregation could have more than one custom, more than one bet din in a city, and even more than one minyan in a shul...

His answer was as follows: More than one custom, such as the way we shake the lulav during hallel, is permitted. We have sources in the Mishnah for this. But more than one Bet Din giving different decisions on the same matter violates the unity of Israel which is the pride of our people and its lifeline. The same applies to more than one minyan within the same congregation. It violates, he says, a Torah prohibition against forming yourselves into smaller groups, LO TITGODEDU, LO TEYASU AGUDOT AGUDOT. He bolsters his argument with proof-texts from the Sifra, a commentary to the Torah that predates the Mishnah, on the Talmud in Menahot which states that our prayers are not answered and our supplication not received and accepted unless we are one group, on the Midrash which states that the unity of our people testifies to the unity and uniqueness of Almighty God, on Maimonides, in Mishnah Torah, in Sefer HaMitzvot and in a responsum, where he says "Each and every Jewish community are required to be in perfect unity without any mahlokes, and this also requires that they not split into two Rabbinical courts, nor into more than one service."

So Rabbi Uziel permits splitting into two services only when they are Ashkenazic and Sefardic which are known as two types of kehilot and recognized as special streams of Judaism, and even this, he says, is controversial. For Israel is only redeemed when they become one community, says the Midrash. Furthermore, splitting for services is very much like doing a mitzvah by means of a sin, which is forbidden. Our forefather's explained this in a beautiful metaphor, when they described the Almighty as having Tefilin on which are written "And who is like Thy People Israel One people in this world". Thus we declare Hear O Israel God is One, and the Almighty in

turn praises the unity of our people" (Sheelot Uteshuvot Piskei Uziel Bisheelot HaZeman, No. 2).

3. We have tried an experiment last week. It was actually not a question of making prayer more comfortable for some people. The challenge was and is to make our shul feel together in such a vast structure. It almost feels as if we are a collection of separate groups, caucusing in different corners of a convention hall. So the experiment did not work. It is understandable. People were greatly inconvenienced by it.

4. But the challenge remains, and I have a few suggestions.

a. We are a hospitable people and this congregation can be typical of our people's warmth. I ask you to pay special attention to people who are here for the first time; to greet them, even during services, but certainly at the kiddush, and to introduce them appropriately. The Chief Rabbi, as well as I myself, want to meet them. So do our Honorary Officers. So do your friends.

b. It would be a much warmer atmosphere if we could sit closer together. I know now, if I didn't know before, that siddur Humash Talit are in your own boxes, and that is very important. What about the concern about sitting in your own seat?

There is a statement in the Talmud that a person is blessed who has a set place for his prayers. The Talmud and commentators explain that this means a set synagogue that is his regular place of worship. It does not mean a set seat within that synagogue. So it would be altogether in order that a person takes his talit, her humash, her siddur out of their own box from their own seat, a seat reserved for their own use during high holidays, and with it move closer to the Aron Hakodesh, further to the front of the Synagogue. In that way, even if their holiday seat were well back in this very large synagogue, they would still have the benefit of the warmth and closeness felt by those who sit almost on top of the bima and pulpit. For there are so many seats available for your choice, belonging to people who do not come every week, and many who come only rarely. I suggest you try that, and you will find it will carry a full reward.

For not only amongst all the children of Israel, but in our own congregation, too, we must strive to enhance the value of HAVERIM KOL YISRAEL, VENOMAR AMEN.