

Letters to the editor

Another point of view about 'partnership minyans'

As an observant Orthodox Jew with an abiding respect for the Halachic process, I found your recent article about "partnership minyans" (Feb. 16 issue) to be quite misleading, on a few counts.

It is inaccurate for the report on "partnership minyans" to represent those groups as an acceptable or reasonable manifestation of Orthodoxy. Reading through the article, it becomes clear that no recognized Orthodox Jewish rabbinical leader or posek (halachic decisor) has sanctioned such prayer circles, so the halachic standing of such 'minyanim' already becomes suspect.

The matter becomes clearer when reading the quote from one of the organizers of the Cambridge, Mass., "minyan": "For me, partnership minyanim are not about the quality of tefillah (prayer) or about giving new meaning to our davening, I believe it is essentially about one thing, feminism, in a very simple meaning; feminism in its purest sense – equality between women and men."

Evidently absent from the organizers' prioritizations, of course, is any concern for:

- accepted standards of normative Orthodox Jewish practice, wherein synagogue rabbis or recognized religious leaders set the parameters for acceptable forms of religious ritual observance (such as prayer);

- the imperative, as Pirke Avot teaches, to "Aseh Lecha Rav" to select a Rabbinic advisor for all of one's religious activities and to abide by his teachings;

- the Rabbinic injunction against men listening to Kol Isha, the voice of a woman in song (and much of prayer, of course, is song);

- the essential value of Tzniut, modesty, embodied in the strict separation of the sexes during prayer.

A Highland Park community member who attended the JOFA conference described to your reporter a similar "minyan" held in our area that ended after, as she termed it, it was "quashed by local religious and lay leaders." As one of the lay leaders involved at the time, I would correct the misperception that religious closed mindedness was at play. Rather, we followed the determination of our religious leaders, who openly termed such "minyanim" as falling outside the boundary of accepted and acceptable Orthodox Jewish activity. Upon receiving such rabbinic counsel, we encouraged our friends and fellow synagogue members to accept the halachic view of their spiritual leader.

One may criticize Orthodox Judaism, or even decide to distance oneself from it, based on what they perceives as its faults. That is each individual's personal decision. But when someone seeks to redefine the nature of Orthodox observance through a series of activities that do not resemble or respect the established processes of Orthodox Judaism or established halachic practices, and then try to pass the product off as "Orthodox," they're not merely fooling themselves, but they are, unfortunately, also fooling others.

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