

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

As some of you may remember, a few years ago I was part of small delegation from the New York Board of Rabbis invited to Salt Lake City by the leadership of the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (LDS). Following that first experience, a few of us have maintained some connections with the local leadership of the Church, and last May 1st, an even smaller group of rabbis, of which I was honored to be part, was invited to tour the soon to be rededicated LDS temple in Washington DC.

If you traveled through the Capital Beltway (I-495), I am sure you saw the magnificent LDS temple, perched on top of a hill. I always wanted to see it closely and I finally had the opportunity on May 1st.

For those who are not familiar with the tenets of the LDS (I wasn't familiar until I was invited to Salt Lake City), they have churches open to everybody. In these churches, they pray, they study and they share moments of camaraderie, mainly on Sundays. In addition, they have temples, where only members of the LDS Church can enter. The exception is a temple that hasn't been dedicated or rededicated yet, hence the invitation we received from the leadership of the LDS Church to visit it.

While there are thousands of LDS churches around the world, there are only 170 dedicated temples (162 currently operating; and 8 previously dedicated, but closed for renovation), 50 under construction, and 62 announced (not yet under construction), for a total of 282 in the world.

At present, there are temples in many U.S. states, as well as in many countries across the world. Several temples are at historical sites of the LDS Church, such as Nauvoo, Illinois, Palmyra, New York, and Salt Lake City, Utah. The importance of temples is often emphasized in weekly meetings, and regular participation in "temple work" is strongly encouraged for all Latter-day Saints.

Within temples, members of the Church make covenants, receive instructions, and perform sacred ceremonies and ordinances, such as baptism for the dead (I am sure you heard about them), washing and anointing (or "initiatory" ordinances), the endowment, and eternal marriage *sealings*. These ordinances are a vital part of the theology of the Church and they can only take place in their temples. Additionally, members consider the temple a place to commune with God, seek God's aid, understand the will of God, and receive personal revelation.

I was surprised to find that the temple itself, despite its imposing size, doesn't have a large room or doesn't function as a place of gathering, but basically is a building with many floors and rooms where the above ordinances of the church take place. Perhaps if we wish to use a familiar terminology, we could say that it is a place of many mitzvah rooms. Seven of these rooms (all identical) serve as the *sealing room*, where couples are married (sealed) for eternity, in a very simple ceremony.

Besides visiting the temple, one of the perks of the visit was to be guided in our tour by one of the top leaders of the LDS Church, Elder Quentin Cook (you may want to Google him), a member of the Quorum of the Twelve of the LDS Church.

When Elder Cook mentioned to our group that the couples in the *sealing room* are sealed for eternity, including the next world, the inevitable question was asked by one of the rabbis: what happens with members of the Church who have remarried, due to divorce, or widowhood? Who are they sealed to in the next world?

The answer that Elder Cook gave surprised me. He said, "I knew you were going to ask me this question. I don't know the answer to it, but I believe that God will sort it out."

Indeed, I was surprised by the honesty of one of the top 15 leaders of a church that counts over 16 million people, a few hundred thousand more than the entire Jewish people, who admitted that neither he nor the other leaders of the Church have all the answers.

And yet, more than surprised I was inspired by the answer itself: "I don't know the answer to it, but I believe that God will sort it out."

Perhaps faith is nothing more and nothing less than knowing that you don't know all the answers, including answers to the most important and challenging questions, but believing that God will sort things out at the end of the day.

Yes, the visit to the temple, the kosher lunch, the camaraderie of my colleagues and hosts, was wonderful. However, the crown of the visit, was the lesson by Elder Cook, a reminder that men and women of faith don't have to own all the answers, but believe and hope that God will sort things out.

Many blessings,

Rabbi Manes Kogan