

The Fire

Rabbi Krohn tells an intriguing story that should inspire us. There was a young man who owned a furniture store in a small community. One morning he noticed smoke rising up between the slats of his parquet floor. He quickly ran to the basement to see what was wrong, and soon had his worst fears realized. A fierce fire was raging in the basement. He was unsuccessful in his attempt to extinguish the fire with a portable extinguisher. By the time he ran upstairs, the fire had already spread to the first floor. The furniture was all aflame. He ran to the phone to call the fire department and then returned to his store, to watch helplessly as it burned to the ground.

The fire department finally arrived, but, alas, all they could do was water down the adjacent store to make sure the fire did not spread. His business was gutted. It would be months before he could even dream of opening up again. A few days after the fire, this young man came to shul and remarked to a friend, "You know, a few days prior to the fire, a fellow came over to me and commented about my late arrival to Minyan. 'You come to shul everyday,' he said, 'but why do you always come so late? You are never there at the beginning of davening.'"

I replied to him, "What difference does it make when I come? The main thing is that in the end I am there!" 'Now I realize that the fire department also came - in the end - when my store had already been turned to rubble. It was too late. Hashem showed me that coming in the end is not good enough. It is no different than the fire department. It was too late.'"

While this may address those who are not there at the beginning of davening, there is another group that is equally disdainful - those who leave early. There are Kaddeishim which are recited at the end of davening for a reason. Apparently, they must be important since it is a point when the yasom, orphan, or one who is reciting Kaddish for the deceased, says Kaddish. There are those of us who feel that this portion of davening is not pertinent to us. We leave at will, or we justify our absence with some form of contrived need. Regrettably, those who must stay for that part of davening are those who say Kaddish. Let us not act in a manner that Heaven has reason for criticizing our behavior. The alternative to leaving at will is being compelled to staying for reasons beyond our control.