

WIMBLEDON 28/4

Last weekend, I was in York to take the service, but I had a free day on the Friday. Because I'm there once or twice a month, I've done

lots of the obvious activities - the Minster, the Railway Museum - and

I couldn't quite bring myself to do the York Chocolate Experience.

But then I found the Cold War nuclear bunker just outside town.

I can never resist a nuclear bunker, so down beneath the earth I went.

This is where, from the 1960s until 1991, 120 volunteers from the

Royal Observer Corps were on standby per sec. At the first hint of international

conflict, they'd send themselves in for 30 days, to monitor the ~~the~~ North

for atomic explosions. Their men and, mostly, women, would abandon their

day jobs to go underground and keep Britain safe, working 8-hour shifts: 8 hours ^{as its people}

on duty, 8 hours to sleep in (unwashed) sheets, and 8 hours to be bored with

in a cramped, smelly rec room. And if patriotic fervour wasn't enough to

motivate them, what did? Apparently, the paint. The walls were painted

in three colours chosen by psychologists to be especially positive: pale blue

WIMB 2/

to keep people calm, dark blue to keep them focussed, and a sandy orange to keep them cheerful. The colours of the desert: sea, sky, sand.

But to counteract that, there was a bizarre rule: no photos. No family mementos. The volunteers, safe underground while their loved ones withstood nuclear blasts up top, were not allowed any pictures with which to remember them. The higher-ups said this was to maintain concentration on the job. But with 8 hours a day to kill in a boring rec room, was there not ~~room~~ space for family memories? The fact is, you can't overcome

basic human emotions with a policy. You can't stop people feeling low ~~with~~ about their family's imminent destruction with a lick of blue paint - even if supplemented by rules and regulations. And yet that's what we have in

both our Torch and hydroch readings today (see: I hope you realize I'd get there eventually!) In the Torch, we have the strictest of punishments

ordained for those who curse God. Now, sometimes we curse God

involuntarily: dropping something heavy on one's foot and exclaiming, "Oh, God!"

And sometimes we curse God to vent the bitterness of our soul at a

WIMB 3/

cruel and unwelcome twist of fate. That's what Job did. God and Satan deliberately set out to torment Job and to push him into a place where

he would be so hurt, so destroyed, so bitter, that he couldn't help but express his wounded feelings, and take out his (not unreasonable) anger on a

God who, being omnipotent, can probably stand it. The rabbis of old said that

Satan's torment was even worse than that of Job, because Satan was

made to do something comparable to breaching a wine bottle without spilling

a drop of wine. But that's why it was such a futile 'test': humans are

like wine bottles. If cracked, our innermost feelings leak out. There's no

surprise about it. There's not necessarily even anything wrong about it. God

has many roles: ruler, creator, parent, shepherd, teacher... and, sometimes,

punchy. Why not? Leviticus's rule against despoiling fails for the same

reason as did the York banker's rule against feeling maudlin. Sometimes we can't

help ourselves, and if we can't help ourselves, maybe we shouldn't try to.

In the vastly controversial but still rather fascinating book 'Facing the Abusing

God', David Blumenthal presents a liturgy to help people express their

WIMB 4/

anger to God: not mutely accepting the bad things that life throws at us -

'God giveth and God taketh away', as Job put it - but pouring out our tormented

hearts. for example:

"My God, Who is our Parent and our Sovereign,

Who injures, destroys and harms beyond reason,

Who also loves graciously, and is compassionate, and cares -

May God turn God's face towards you so that you can see God.

May God's face smile upon you, and may you know that.

May ~~you~~ God share with you God's anguish and God's shame at

God's own hateful actions.

May God bless you, and may you receive God's blessing. Amen."

And, he even adds, "Avinu, Malkeinu, we have sinned before You. Avinu, Malkeinu,

You have sinned before us."

Sometimes, we're angry. No rule or law can prevent that.

Perhaps we shouldn't let it.

Perhaps we should bare our souls.