

Oy, Is This Life

Judaism affirms life's importance, stressing that we live life. God grants life, but we choose how we live. The Shabbat before Rosh HaShanah, we read that God urges us to choose life: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life--if you and your offspring would live" Deuteronomy (30:19). Life is a gift; what we do with it is not.

One High Holiday theme is life's value and quality. Traditionally, Judaism holds that life's quantity and quality go together. Our choices affect our life. On what we base our decisions brings us to the deeper questions of life's meanings and values.

We repeat in the High Holiday liturgy *zokreinu l'hayyim*: "Remember us that we may live, O King who delights in life. Inscribe us in the Book of Life, for Your sake, living God." The Hasidic Gerer Rebbe, in *S'fat Emet*, comments: "Remember us that we might live the life that You give us as a gift; may it be for Your sake. May we not waste it, heaven forbid, on futile things." Two ideas underlie the rebbe's view on our gift of life: Live our life for God's sake, as God would wish; Remember our values. Time is important; we cannot do it all. Live by priorities, not wasting time on futile things.

"Non-futile things" are Godlike, our souls and our relationships with other people created in God's image. We best examine our past accomplishments and prepare for our future deeds by determining how what we do affects others and us. In the process, we must evaluate our values. When we look to God, Torah, *Halakah*, or the Jewish people, we search for truth, justice, mercy, and commitment to others and to ourselves. We must determine our motives. Did we tell for truth, our advancement, or another person's loss of status or position? Did we look away, or become involved? Our deeds and our motives testify for or against us. God does not literally sit in front of a great ledger with a giant pen tallying positive and negative figures. A *midrash* tells us, we humans are the pens, and our own words and deeds form the Book of Life.

May these High Holidays challenge us to discover our deeper values, our hidden motives, and our buried resources in our search for a life to live not just for our own sake. May we turn to God and our tradition for the sources of choices that can truly make life a gift. Then we will return to our values, and our "*t'shuvah, ut'fillah, utz'dakah*"--"penitence, prayer and good deeds"--will "annul the severity of the decree" as we read in *Un'taneh Tokef*.

LeShanah Tovah Tikkateivu

May You Be Inscribed For a Good and Healthy Year

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