

JEWISH WISDOM ON: ACTUALIZING YOUR UNIQUE LIFE POTENTIAL

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT ARE DOING HERE ON EARTH?

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 31a

Four questions will be asked of man in the World to come:

The first question is: Were you faithful in all your givings and takings?

The second question is: Did you set aside fixed time for study?

The third question is: Did you participate in the *mitzvah* to be fruitful and multiply?

The fourth question is: Did you hope and work for the world's redemption?

QUESTION ONE: FAITHFULNESS

Were You Faithful In All Your Givings And Takings?

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sukkah 56b

During the Hellenistic occupation of the Land of Israel, The Syrian-Greeks had seized control of the entire country, including the holy city of Jerusalem. The Holy Temple, was transformed into a pagan temple.

In the midst of this turmoil was Jewish woman, Miriam, a daughter of the priestly Bilgah family, who served in the second Holy Temple. At this tragic period, she had completely abandoned her people, left her faith, and even married out to a top Greek military officer, in charge of oppressing, murdering and denigrating her own people.

And then, as the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, Miriam entered with them, removed her shoe from her foot, and stamped upon the Altar with her sandal, crying out: "Wolf! Wolf! - "Lukus! Lukus!"— for how long will you continue to consume the [offerings and] money of the Jewish people without [helping] them in their time of distress?"

Code of Jewish Law, 1:1

"I have set the Lord before me constantly" (Psalms 16:8): And one should not be ashamed because of people who mock him.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 37a

All creatures were created in multiples. With one exception: The human being. Man was created alone. When Adam was created, there was no other human being present in the entire planet.

Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, Likutei Sichot Vol. 24, Ki Tisa:

Why did Adam have to be lonely for a while till G-d formed his "better half? The answer is simple but profound: G-d wanted to teach us a lesson. *Human identity does not exist in relation to others.* I am not a response to you. My value is never dependent on your validation or approval. My existence is never conditional on your acceptance of it. My "self" has absolute inherent value. My "I" has infinite dignity and is perfect the way it is.

G-d loves each of us unconditionally, unequivocally, not because of anything we do or we don't do, but because our very "I" is Divine.

QUESTION TWO: CONSISTENCY *Did You Set Fixed Times For Torah Study?*

Midrash, Introduction to Ein Yaakov

One sage, by the name of Ben Azzai, believed it was the verse in Genesis (Genesis 5:1): "This is the book of the chronicles of man; on the day that G-d created man He created him in the image of G-d."

Another sage, by the name of Ben Zoma, holds a different verse to be more central to Jewish thought: "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our G-d, the Lord is One (Deuteronomy 6:4)."

A third Talmudist, Ben Nanas, chooses this verse: "You shall love your fellow man like yourself (Leviticus 19:18)."

Finally, the fourth sage, Shimon, the son of Pazi, casts his pitch for the epic verse of the Bible. It is culled from the section in this week's portion that deals with the obligation during the time of the Temple to bring each day two lambs as an offering to G-d. "One sheep you shall offer in the morning and the second sheep in the afternoon (Numbers 28:4)." This verse, according to Shimon, the son of Pazi, is the defining verse of Judaism. The Midrash concludes: "One of the rabbis stood on his feet and declared, 'The verdict follows the opinion of Shimon the son of Pazi!'"

The Kotzer Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgenshtern, 1787-1859

In truth, I admire Pharaoh. The plagues kept coming, they became worse and worse, yet he never gave up. Furthermore, Pharaoh knew that, ultimately, he would be defeated. How can you overcome our Almighty God? Nevertheless, he persevered, with remarkable consistency.

QUESTION THREE: BEING AWARE THE "WHERE" BEYOND THE "I" *Did You Participate In The Mitzvah To Be Fruitful and Multiply?*

Chronicles / Divrei Hayamim 1 29:15

Our days are as a shadow upon the earth.

Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit 96:2

This verse means that there are three types of shadows. One is the shadow of a bird, which flies by quickly and casts its shadow but for a fleeting moment. The second is the shadow cast by a wall, and finally there is the shadow generated by the tree.

THE SHADOW OF A BIRD:

A Professor stood before his philosophy class and had some items in front of him. When the class began, wordlessly, he picked up a very large and empty jar and proceeded to fill it with golf balls. He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was.

So the Professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was.

The Professor next picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else. He asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with an unanimous "Yes."

The Professor then produced two cans of beer from under the table and poured the entire contents into the jar, effectively filling the empty space between the sand. "Now," said the Professor, as the laughter subsided, "I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life.

The golf balls are the important things - your G-d, your soul, your family, your children, your health, your friends, your passions, your conscience - things that if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full.

The pebbles are the other things that matter like your job, your house, your car. The sand is everything else - the small stuff."

"If you put the sand into the jar first", he continued, "there is no room for the pebbles or the golf balls. The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you. Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Take time to build a relationship with your soul. There will always be time to clean the house, and fix the disposal. Take care of the golf balls first, the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand."

When he had finished, one of the students raised her hand and with a puzzled expression, inquired what the beer represented.

The Professor smiled. "I'm glad you asked. It just goes to show you that no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a couple of L'chayim's."

THE SHADOW OF A WALL:

Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit 96:2

A shadow of a wall has some permanence, it is seen during the early hours of the morning and in late afternoon, but in the midday sun, the impact of the wall fades; there is no wall-shadow.

These are people who leave an impact in the very early stages or in the very late moments of their lives. In the morning and evening hours, when they are very young or quite old, when things are quiet and calm, only then are they ready to give of themselves to others and invest in eternity.

THE SHADOW OF A TREE:

Deuteronomy 20:19

When you lay siege to a city for a long time, fighting against it to capture it, do not destroy its trees by putting an ax to them, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down, for man is like the tree of the fields.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Taanit 25a

An old man was planting a tree. A young person passed by and asked, What are you planting?

A carob tree, the old man replied.

Silly fool, said the youth. Don't you know that it takes 70 years for a carob tree to bear fruit?

That's okay, said the old man. Just as others planted for me, I plant for future generations.

Genesis 3:9

But G-d called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, 1798, in the Russian Gulag:

The words of the Bible were not meant for their time alone but for all time. So it is with the question G-d asked Adam and Eve. It was not addressed to them alone but to each of us in every generation.

We squander our days and nights on artificial, temporary objectives; we become consumed with self-preservation and gratification, and we believe that we can hide from the consequences.

But always, after we have lost our course, we hear the voice of G-d in our heart asking: Where are you? What have you done with your life? I have given you a certain amount of years; how are you using them?

QUESTION FOUR: A REDEMPTION-DRIVEN LIFE
Did You Hope And Work For The World's Redemption?

Exodus 19:5-6

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Isaiah 49:6-7

It is too small a thing for you to be my servant.... I will also make you a light unto the nations, that my redemption may reach to the ends of the earth. This is what the Lord says, the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel: to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers, "Kings will see you and stand up, princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Likkutei Sichot, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, vol. 9 pp. 410-483

Why is Rosh Hashanah the *Jewish* New Year if it celebrates the creation of the world?

The answer touches on the essence of Judaism's mission statement. The role of the Jew is to impact, positively, the entire world; as we say in the Aleinu prayer, "to repair the world under the sovereignty of G-d." We were chosen to inspire all of humanity to become beacons of love, light and hope; to infuse life with unwavering ethical morals and values, goodness, holiness and surpassing spiritual beauty. As we pray in each service of Rosh Hashanah: "Let everything that has been made know that You are its Maker; let every creature understand that you have formed it; and let everything with a life's breath in its nostrils proclaim: 'Hashem, the G-d of Israel, is King, and His Kingship rules over everything.'" This is more than a prayer; it is a mission statement.

Rosh Hashanah is "our" holiday, because we take responsibility for the world! The celebration of creation is a Jewish festival, because we have a calling to lead the world