

Yom Kippur 2024

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I remember going to synagogue on Yom Kippur as a teenager when I had begun to fast...and I always felt a bit fearful. Had I been good enough, kind enough, generous enough for my name to be inscribed in "The Book" and be guaranteed to live another year?

I've since outgrown those fears. I don't believe G-d is keeping track and checking off whether or not I live another year. It might have nothing to do with G-d, although I am a deep believer and feel G-d in my heart all the time. Aren't I the captain of my ship? Whether I live or die physically is mostly up to me - my lifestyle, my diet, how I take care of myself, although, beyond that, it might be my doctors and medical science if I'm unlucky enough to become seriously ill. So, does faith play a part here?

I do, however, control my moral life, my integrity, my humility, my values, my soul. In that respect, it's fully up to me how I choose to live. Will I infuse my being with love, peace, gratitude, and joy and try to be a guiding light unto others? How and where will my moral compass direct me? I'm in charge of my thoughts, my emotions, my decisions; it all comes from within me...and if I choose, my soul will live another year.

And that's when I ran into a conundrum...

Judaism teaches that the body and soul are separate yet indivisible partners in human life.

Genesis 2:7 - Neshamah - G-d blows a breath of life into man-an element from G-d that animates the body.

Genesis 6:3 - Ruach - The breath of G-d will end at death since man is flesh and mortal.

Leviticus 17:11 - Nefesh - The life of the flesh is in the blood.

Over time, these beliefs, these teachings, these thoughts evolved into the idea that the soul is the unique, everlasting intangible part of a person that returns to G-d upon death.

So where does that leave me? Where does it leave each one of us as we chant prayers admitting our transgressions and asking G-d for forgiveness. Here's an idea to ponder.

Yom Kippur may be translated as the Day of Atonement, but let's welcome it as a Day of Gladness. Yom Kippur is a day of opportunity to change, to begin anew, an opportunity to examine ourselves honestly without excuses, an opportunity to ponder our relationship with G-d. Whether it's G-d or nature or the energy of the universe that is your mantra, Yom Kippur is an opportunity for each one of us to reset, to realign, to decide the kind of person we want to be. We begin today with our moral compass in place, but, hopefully, by the end of services, that moral compass will look a little different - a little more accepting of ourselves and others.

And if our soul is our moral compass, its highest elevation is love. Whether this comes from G-d or simply the belief in something bigger than each one of us might not be a question to be answered today.

So, as we begin, I invite all of you to feel the love within you. Take this Yom Kippur as an opportunity for a refresh, for a clean slate...one that only you can fill. Call it your "Book of Life."