

## Personal Reflections

*Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt  
Erev Rosh Hashana  
September 22, 2006*

From time to time, and especially at this time of year, we may wonder why we are here, what life is about, and why life is as it is. Religion offers a means of making sense of these existential questions. It provides a framework to help understand things that happen to us and events and catastrophes that transpire in our world.

We may ponder our fate and existence and ask: Why is our lot what it is? Is it predetermined, or do we have any influence over the outcome? If the nature of our fate is predetermined, then who makes that determination? And furthermore, when, how, and on what basis is it decreed? If we are masters of our fate, then on what basis should we decide how to act? Is this life all there is? If there is an afterlife, what is it like? What are the criteria for admittance? If not, and this is the end of our existence, then is there a point to having lived? And if there is a purpose or meaning to life, then what is the point of it all?

Reflection on these issues may lead us to ask other questions, such as: What should be our goals in life? Should it just be to enjoy material pleasures, or is there more to life than that, which brings us back to one of the biggest, unanswerable mysteries which also commands our attention and speculation: What happens after we die?

The issues are not new and have, in fact, perplexed the human race since the beginning of time. These ultimate issues have been raised by each and every generation. Every religion and philosophies which are not religions, attempt to respond to these questions. Many of the ancient religions offer answers which reflect world views immersed in superstitious beliefs and which may seem primitive and unsophisticated by modern standards.

Judaism is unique for a number of reasons. Despite it being such an ancient tradition, it is amazingly modern in its outlook. It is comforting to comb our tradition and read venerated texts and sources and discover that our sages grappled with so many of the same questions which plague and baffle us today. It is even more amazing and refreshing to see the doubts and skepticism evident in their responses.

For me, this is part of what I find so compelling and attractive about Judaism. I am a Jew not so much because of the answers given but because of the questions it asks. I love the fact that our sages did not bequeath to us one packaged, "take it or leave it," "one answer fits all" response. Unlike other religions which present simplistic but clear-cut answers to these questions, Judaism often does not offer uniform responses. Rather, it offers a plethora of profound possibilities. While offering a perspective and means of understanding our world, sometimes the responses may even be in conflict and in tension with one another. At other times, our sages confess their inability to comprehend that which is beyond them - thus, encouraging us to continue the quest and to continue to ask the questions.

I love Judaism and love being a Jew because I believe in looking at the world and exploring questions about life and what happens to human beings from a Jewish perspective. I love what our religion teaches us. Judaism is unique among world religions because it calls upon us to study the various responses given by our sages and then to use our intellect to decide which approach to accept.

I am drawn to Judaism because, in addition to what it does for my intellect and how it challenges me spiritually and intellectually, it moves and touches my soul in unimaginable ways. I am constantly inspired to be a part of this remarkable people. Its values are all so life-affirming, reasonable, sensible and intelligent. Our customs, rituals and traditions combine with a sense of being a people who endeavor to live morally and who value the need to work for *tikun olam*, the obligation to improve the world and to seek to create a just society. We are a small people who have had a profound impact beyond our numbers. We are a people who has walked in history striving to bring the message of God to everyday life without imposing or forcing it on others against their will.

All of this is what I find so inspiring, uplifting, exhilarating and fulfilling about being a Jew. This people, this tradition, this heritage, its teachings, aspirations, yearnings and message are what give meaning, purpose, joy and fulfillment to life and to me.

May it continue to live on forever.

*Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt*  
*Congregation B'nai Tzedek*  
*Potomac, Maryland*  
*September 22, 2006*  
[potomacrebbe@bnaitzedek.org](mailto:potomacrebbe@bnaitzedek.org)