

Rosh Hashanah in the Round 2016 - The Measure of Our Days

Introductory Guided Meditation: **Looking into your Book of Life**

Rabbi Sarah Graff

I want to invite you to join me on a Rosh Hashanah journey. To go on this journey, you may find it helpful to close your eyes, find a comfortable place in your seat, relax your muscles, let go of whatever was on your mind, and just breathe...

I'm going to take us on a journey to two extremes.

And while each extreme may elicit some fear or discomfort, I pray that it will also bring you insight and direction.

On this day, each year, we imagine God sitting on God's throne, gazing into The Book of Life, Sefer Hachayim.

But this Rosh Hashanah, amazingly, it is actually you that is looking into the Book of Life. Your Book of Life, right here, in front of you.

If you had been given the choice, maybe you wouldn't have looked. But you did. And now you know...

This Yom Kippur will be the last day of your life. You see that your end will not be painful. The end is no longer your focus. Your focus is on the 10 days you have left.

What do you want to do with the time that you have?

What do you clearly not want to do?

Who do you want to see? Who do you want to spend time with? What do you want to do with them?

Start with one person. What do you want to say to them? What do you want them to know?

Who else do you want to see? What do you need to tell them?

Who do you want to say thank you to?

Who do you want to say sorry to?

Who do you want to forgive?

As you look back over your life, what are some of the memories that you hold most dear? What are the stories you want to share?

What are the memories you hope others will have of you? How do you want to be remembered?

Now, suddenly you hear... a shofar blast, and you realize... this was all a dream! Yet, here you are again at the Book of Life. You peer into it again, and you can't believe what you see. The day of your death is Yom Kippur... in 100 years. You have 100 years of (reasonably) healthy life still to live.

Now what? Now what do you do with your time?

Now who are the people you want to spend your time with?

Who are the people you've often said you wished you had more time for?

What do you want to do with them, if now you "have the time"?

Who seems like they'd be an interesting friend?

Who might you like to learn from?

What do you want to learn, in your long life ahead?

What new skills, hobbies, practices might you like to try, now that you have the time?

Do you want to change your work? Do you want to become something else? What will give your life meaning?

Do you want to volunteer? What are the causes you care about most?

What are the problems that worry you most? What creative approaches seem more worth trying, if time is not the problem?

What would be helpful to learn? How can you be of help?

What do you think will make you happy, day to day, in this long life ahead?

What will make your time seem worth living?

What will make you look back and say: mine was a life well-lived?

All of a sudden you hear the shofar again, and you realize, this too was a dream. This time, you open your eyes, and you're back in Rosh Hashanah in the Round, 2016, 5777. You sing of the Book of Life. You pray to be inscribed in the Book of Life. (B'sefer chayim...). But you don't know what's in it.

You don't know how long you have to live, or what your life will bring. All you know is these dreams and perhaps the insights they have given you this Rosh Hashanah.

If you haven't opened your eyes already, I invite you to open your eyes, return to our shared space, and reflect on where you've been. What did you learn from your dreams?

How would you live differently if you only had 10 days to live?

How would you live differently if you knew you had 100 more years to live?

What can you learn from all this for whatever time you do have? for the new year that starts today?

Handout

In a moment, we're going to pass out a handout, with two additional scenarios to consider.

One is a text from the Talmud, in which King David asks to know when he will die and gets a rather interesting answer from God.

The other is a prediction from Ray Kurzweil, renown computer scientist, author, and futurist, and more importantly, Scott's former boss at Google. Ray is famous for making audacious predictions, a high percentage of which have already come true. And one of Ray's predictions is that by the year 2029, scientific advances will make it so that our life expectancy increases by a year every year that we live. This means that our life expectancy will be indefinite. Or we will be on our way to living forever.

I've spent quite a bit of time with Ray. He's a very thoughtful guy. He's serious about these predictions, and he speaks quite compellingly about how radically increasing our lifespan will be for the good.

I wanted to share with you some of his ideas (what I have here is from a personal correspondence with him), as an interesting counterpoint to the more typical themes of the High Holidays, of contemplating the brevity and fragility of our lives.

So without further ado, I invite you to turn to your neighbor, peruse these texts, and discuss how you want to approach the measure of your days. (We will also be passing around some candy, to add some sweetness to your reflection.)

Chevruta Time

Speakers:

Lee Erman

Lisa Goldman

Closing Song - Achat Sha'alti P. 27 (Psalm 27)

One thing I ask of Adonai, this I seek:
To dwell in the House of God all the days of my life.
To behold God's beauty and visit in God's sanctuary.

We can think of this as being about living in connection with God. But perhaps we can also understand "dwelling in the house of Adonai" as a way of expressing those **golden moments** when we feel like we're really living.

When we feel our love, our connection, our power, our purpose. When we feel ourselves making a difference to someone else. When we feel someone else making a difference to us. When we realize we are being our best self.

I'd like to sing the song, as a prayer that however long we have to live, whether days, or years, or eternity, that we fill our time with these golden moments, that we notice them when we are in them, and we celebrate them with all our being.

Achat sha'alti me'et Adonai, otah avakesh
Shivti b'veit Adonai, kol y'mei chayai
Lachazot b'noam, b'noam Adonai, ul'vaker b'heichalo.