

Yom Kippur suggests an imaginative exercise. Pretend you had 25 hours left to live: what might you do? The practices of Yom Kippur move us away from the physical and almost to a play acting of our own funeral. We refrain from eating and drinking, from anointing, from wearing jewelry or leather, and from acts of physical intimacy. In other words, we put aside our body, almost as if we are being readied for the grave. And it goes a step further. Many of us wear a kittel, a white robe read on a few occasions but including as funeral shrouds.

So we are acting like it's our last day. And the rituals and behaviors of this day are meant to reinforce that feeling. So if we had 25 hours, what might we do?

Well, if we live in the YOLO (You only live once mindset) we might try and cross some stuff off our bucket list. Maybe get up to Yosemite and climb half dome. Or go water skiing in Sonoma. We would try and gather an experience.

By contrast, if we live in a more people focused ethic, we would focus on healing broken relationships and strengthening. Maybe we would reach out to people we have hurt and see if we can effect healing. Maybe we would reflect on the meaning of our lives. In other words, we might sing fewer piyyutim, but we otherwise do something pretty similar to the day we have in front of us.

Today we are taking stock of lives in a different way. Today isn't about doing well, it's about doing good. Today isn't about job success or financial status, but rather:

How much good am I doing?

Where is my gratitude and joy?

How are the key relationships in my life?

Judaism often invites imagination, invites us to live as if each moment matters Yom Kippur focuses on mortality; another source I love focuses us on the value of each day and the need to see any given day as particularly significant.

Our Rabbis teach: when we wake up in the morning, we ought to say: the world was created for my sake. In an ego approach, this means the world exists so that I, David Booth, may walk its fair and green pastures. It's all about me.

But there is another way of seeing this. If the world is created for my sake, and things matter, then it matters how I use the day. If I am good, the whole world was worth creating. If not, then not so much. Again, the exercise raises the stakes. Because today really matters and what I do really matters.

So a few stories about the value of each day.

My cousin Benny, who is a wonderful and loving man, used to work in a hair salon in Jerusalem. One of his regular clients called one day to ask if he could fit her into his schedule. She was a

regular, so he reluctantly agreed. She showed up that afternoon, dressed beautifully. He did her hair and chatted. Partly, because he is a good guy, and partly because it generates a better tip. He told her she was beautiful inside and out. And that he appreciated getting to know her.

She left and Benny thought nothing of it. The next day, he got a call from her. She had been planning to commit suicide. She had dressed herself, and wanted to get her done and then end her life. But Benny's sharing with her, noting her beauty, inspired her to try and live another day. She was so grateful to him for noticing her. Without even knowing it, Benny saved her life.

A friend of mine told me the following story;

I was out with my amazing daughter, coming out of a kosher restaurant the other day. Outside, quietly sits a clearly homeless man. Without fanfare, my daughter approaches him, spends a moment. She comes back, and tells me "I gave him some money, but more importantly, I asked him his name". She continues "One of the things I've learned is that the homeless lose being recognized - they are rarely given recognition, so I told him my name, asked him his. He lit up I gave him some money, but we shared a recognition".

So when you see someone at San Antonio and El Camino looking for work today, the stakes are pretty high

When your waiter comes over the table, how you react changes his or her world.

When you set down your smartphone and really see someone, you were worth creating today.

I've been studying the Degel Mahane Ephraim this year, an Hasidic commentary on the Torah. He also suggests an imaginative exercise, a living as if. He notes the conditionality of the book of Deuteronomy. We usually understand Deuteronomy to be saying if you do good, God will be good to you, and if you bad, the same.

The Degel suggests a new understanding. Deuteronomy is warning us that the whole world is conditional. We think the sun has to rise the next day, but it's not true. Every day God chooses to place divine energy into the world that sustains creation. We can't take it for granted-it's a gift.

So what if we live as if each day and moment is a gift?

I had a dear friend in the community who died a few years ago. He received a very bad diagnosis. He was told he had two years left to live. Rather than become upset or angry, he resolved to live each day with meaning. He made some appointments with me to talk about

Jewish views on the afterlife and also to honor our friendship. He spent time with his family, arranging for his wife's needs after his death. He went to innumerable sporting events with his son. Sadly, he was a Cal fan, but no one is perfect. And he lived 6 months, 1 year, 2 years. He lived 5 years. When he woke up, he would be filled with gratitude that he had one more day to be with the people about whom he cared the most.

In the modern prayer, we praise God for the miracles that are with us each day. We praise God that each day is a gift. Each day is a blessing and a chance to do good.

Mitzvot are the technology of how we live as if God is in our lives, listening, loving, caring. They are the practices and techniques that let us imagine our lives have meaning.

As some of you know, my son Josh is wrestling with fairly severe depression. He lives with his boyfriend in Seattle and at the moment I hear a lot of pain in his voice. He isn't so in touch with me, except on Friday's. I have the practice of blessing him every Friday and that is the one day he regularly takes my call. Sometimes we talk and it has meaning. Other times its just the blessing and not much else. But I bless him as if it will mean something. As if the blessing has the power to at least alleviate the suffering of my poor sweet boy. And somehow that ritual, that mitzvah, is meaningful to him as well.

Here is a key source about the ways in which Mitzvot provide meaning into our lives.

These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world but whose principal remains in the world that is coming. Honoring parents; acts of kindness; early attendance at the house of study; hospitality to guests; visiting the sick; providing for the bride and groom; escorting the dead; absorption in prayer bringing peace between people, and the study of Torah is greater than all of them.

אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פרותיהם בעולם הזה והקרן קיימת לו לעולם הבא.
ואלו הן. כבוד אב ואם. וגמילות חסדים. והשכמת בית המדרש. שחרית
וערבית. והכנסת אורחים. ובקור חולים. והכנסת כלה. ולוית המת. ועיון
תפילה. והבאת שלום בין אדם לחברו ובין איש לאשתו. ותלמוד תורה כנגד
כלם:

This particular list of mitzvot create a community, a community with space enough for love and in which we would want to live.

I know a daughter whose father died. Everyone expected her mother to die first- she'd been ill, the father healthy. Plus, her father had really done everything for her so it was harder to imagine her on her own. But that's not how God willed it. Since her father died, that daughter has spent countless hours with her mother. She has helped her sister find a new place for her mother to live. She's slept in her old bedroom even though she now has kids and a family. Think what she is doing for her mother: and think what she is teaching her children.

Or Gemilut Hesed, acts of kindness to those in need. Barchi Gillai has been kind enough the last couple of years to coordinate our meal trains to those in need. We offer meals when someone has a surgery or other moment when help really matters. When people are in touch with me about it, the food is appreciated (and its pretty good, by the way) but the visit, the sense of caring offered, it what really matters.

I was at a funeral a few months ago. A close friend of the deceased drove up from LA to be at the funeral and the returned home. "This is where I had to be" he told the bereaved son. Doesn't that make the world a better place?

Or visiting the sick. My Mom was given an orchid. She didn't really want it. She had a very sick neighbor whom she had been wanting to visit anyway. So she took the orchid for the visit. As my Mom's neighbor opened the door, her neighbor burst into tears because she loved orchids. My Mom went in and they had a lovely visit. It was the last time my mother ever saw her alive. It didn't alleviate her pain, but for a few hours it cured her suffering.

Hospitality- my daughter just started college in NYC. My dear friend Charlie has been having her over for a few Shabbat and holiday meals. During Rabbinical school, we often had Charlie over for dinner. He told Naomi that he was pleased to people to pay back how good we had been to him. But here's the thing. We never did it as a favor. We did it because Charlie is a good guy. And this is what's amazing. Charlie's two elementary age boys have fallen in love with my daughter. So they really want her to come over so it can make their lives better! This is what the Krigels or the Dinitz or so many others are doing to build community.

Prayer is where I recharge, and spending the time for reflection and recitation reminds of me of the types of person I want to be. Similarly, Torah study is where I learn what I ought to be doing in the first place.

These are the acts of lasting significance – they matter now and they matter at all times. It is encouraging us to see mitzvot as building blocks of sacred community. When we honor our parents, and visit the sick, and open our homes – we are building the kind of world founded on kindness in which we want to live. And part of the way we get there is living as if God sees us and loves us.

The source wants to raise the stakes. Let's live as if these acts really matter- and then see how much it actually changes the world. Let's live as if God cares what we do – and then see how that improves our behavior.

So you've got about 24 hours left. Are you ready to live as if your next interaction might save someone's life? Are you ready to accept the day as a gift, filled with gratitude? Are you ready to use the mitzvot as tools to help build a world founded on love?

Because those are the stakes. Weve got one day to figure this out. So lets get to work.