

A Priest, a Minister, and Rabbi are each asked what they want people to say about them at their funeral. The Priest said, "I would like them to say, 'He was a man of God who saved many souls.'" The Minister said, "I would like them to say, 'His sermons inspired multitudes to repent!'" The Rabbi said, "I want them to say, 'Hey look, **he's moving!**'"

The beauty of humor is that it captures both absurdity and truth. We will all one day pass on, but we'd rather not.

It is worth spending time thinking about what this joke is based on: **what reputation do you want to have** by the time you die? What will matter most to you **and others** about **how** you lived? What do you want others to say about you at **your** funeral?

On Yom Kippur we gather to think clearly about how we live our lives. But what we come away with may be different if we reflect looking forwards toward the continuation of our life, or if we look backward from the point of view of our funeral.

Columnist David Brooks has written on the question of whether we are living to write our resume, or if we're living to write our eulogy. Writing our resume is the pursuit of material accomplishments, ambition, and recognition. Writing our eulogy is the ways we cultivate good character, deepen our souls and touch the lives of others. People remember you for your eulogy, not your resume. It's a lovely way to frame Yom Kippur: Are we living our resume or our eulogy?

The confounding question is why is it difficult to live the way think we should? If we think we should be living more of our eulogy, why is it that we spend most of our time living our resume?

Brooks based his writing around Rabbi Soloveitchik's 1965 work, "The Lonely Man of Faith," where he reflects on two natures of Adam, the human. Adam I is our resume writer, the ambitious conqueror. Adam II is the humble master of presence, of compassion for people and the world. What is perhaps parallel to Plato, Soloveitchik describes these two natures of the human that are at constant war with each other. I understand Plato spoke of the animal vs. angelic natures of the human. This inner tension is eternal, and up to us to manage.

The Rabbinic tradition tells of a moment of jealousy expressed by the Angels to God upon the creation of Adam & Eve. The Angels are created for and with a purpose, and they live wholly in service to that purpose. But, says the tradition, they cannot grow any closer to God their creator, and this is a source of pain to them. Humanity, on the other hand, can move either closer to God, or we can move further away. Our choices, our spiritual and emotional work, and the ways we grab control of the wheel of our lives is what determines the direction we head. And the Angels feel we mostly squander our potential. Perhaps we do.

We have an instinct to build a resume, but many of us have a hope and desire to build a worthy eulogy. Is it possible to bring these two together when our inner instincts are at war with each other? Can we regulate ourselves so that ambition is not our primary motivator? Can we get these inner forces to work together?

I learned from my father, z"l, that there is such a thing as ethical-capitalism. The difference between ethical and unethical capitalism would be the presence or absence of **self-regulation**. If a business could maintain competition at a healthy level, if they can suffice on **winner take**

**enough** and not all, then there will be more for everyone. Life is not zero-sum. Even if not perfect, self-regulating our impulses and creating balance in our nature is probably a good thing. And this is as well reflected in the natural world.

We have entered this week into the Shmitah/Sabbatical year, the seventh year when the Torah dictates that debts are to be canceled, and is when we let farmland grow fallow, meaning we don't actively farm it, and we don't sell its produce. It is a biblical way of restoring balance to local economics, to the community, and for the land itself. It's a practice in national self-regulation and refresh. This "sabbatical" is a model for how we manage going back and forth between our inner animal and angel.

Yom Kippur is a drama. The customary "afflictions" we afflict ourselves with for the day are meant to **simulate**—not *stimulate!*—our mortal decline. This may sound morbid. But this observance is meant to have the power of an acting class. When inhabiting a character, we discover and pull out truths and perspectives from within ourselves that we try on and wear on the outside. Acting isn't "pretend." Acting is "becoming." **Today** is the day we playact the true **contrition** that comes when we realize time's up. **Today** is the day we **feel** what it is to desire repair and a change of ways. **Today** is the day we take seriously the preciousness of life, that it matters we exist, and that we know it will one day come to an end. Death is a backboard against we rebound into thinking about the preciousness of time. And there isn't as much as we hope.

As the Torah repeats, "I put before you Life and Death, Blessing and Curse. Choose Life that you might live." Judaism is decidedly a "this world" religion. The concept of

an afterlife grew out of a rabbinic attempt to **inspire** Jews to live Torah informed lives. When people ask, “Why should I do this? What will be my reward for reorganizing my life around these principles?” the Rabbis respond with, “Don’t worry about your reward, it will come in *Olam Habah*, in the World that is Coming.”

One reading of this is spiritual delayed gratification. But one can also say that the “world that is coming” is the world **you create** by doing mitzvot and recrafting your time on earth. If you start to keep Shabbat, there will be one day a week when your home has a refreshed kind of order, where there’s time to share with family and friends, and where you can just be. For many, myself included, this is taste of the World to Come, but it is also a world I create with my actions today.

While we’re still here, Choose Life. When “choosing life” as a Jew, we seek to live a dynamic spiritual path that seeks to enhance the experience of humanity. We choose life when we apportion 10% of our net-income to *Tzedakkah/charity*. Giving is getting. Giving shows we are self-regulating, that our ambition for “more” is under control. When we give, we alleviate suffering and expand the breathing room for organizations that support human flourishing. Here we should all take a few pages out of the Mormon playbook. They tithe to the penny. It’s inspiring. **Being a giver is a reputation worth achieving and would be notable on any eulogy.**

We Choose Life when we control our speech, when we limit engaging in gossip. Today, there are too many ways we can violate this most basic tenet of morality. Before we hit send, let’s ask ourselves if this would **make our eulogy better or worse**. Before we retweet someone’s “calling someone out”

or some sensationalizing political claim, let's ask if engaging in the conversation is worth it. Can we really heal the world on twitter?

At our Selichot service, we watched the Albert Brooks and Meryl Streep classic film, "Defending Your Life." In it, we learn that when people pass on, they come before a tribunal to defend whether or not their lives had been worthy, whether they'd **conquered their fears and lived an open-hearted life**. If they did, their soul would continue up the celestial chain. It's a nice question to ask oneself.

The Talmud would have produced a different film. It teaches that when a person passes on, their soul is brought before a Beit Din, a tribunal of Judges, and they are asked 6 questions that evaluate the quality or success of the life standing before them:

1. *Nasata v'natata b'emunah?* *Did you transact/ deal faithfully? Were you ethical in business? Were you honest in your dealings with your fellow? Were you able to conquer your inclination to steal, or take advantage?*
2. *Did you fix time for learning Torah?* Making it a priority to learn Torah means that you make it a practice to reflect on everything Judaism would teach to make life meaningful and valuable, to live morally and ethically, to regulate the self, to expand one's mind, and contemplate one's existence.
3. *Did you engage in procreation?* Not only to create more Jews, but, perhaps, since children are an important way to teach a person about self-sacrifice, have you learned **how to set your own needs aside for the sake of another?** This is a way to learn how to moderate one's self-absorption, and perhaps make a little more room for God's Voice and presence.
4. *Did you hope for salvation?* Living with a vision of redemption inspires **hope**. Hope and aspiration are oxygen to the despairing heart. Hope motivates goodness.

5. *Did you engage in the dialectics of Wisdom?* Did you try to deepen your sense of truth about life? Did you develop your mind enough to see clearly what is good and right?
6. *Did you understand one thing from another?* One gets high marks if they catch nuance and subtleties. No issue is “black & white,” and we would be lost without nuanced arguments and perspectives. This helps us to be more compassionate and understanding and helps us to see the world in more fullness and complexity. Perhaps this is how the Angels see the world.

Certainly, each one of these questions merits deeper exploration. But together, one can see a theme of seeking to **refine one's character** through **engaged practice** of learning, ethical behavior, and with the hope of growing **into a person that increasingly cares for others**. Not one of these questions seems to care about how far you went in your career, or how much money you made. People are what matter. Eulogy over resume.

I love the saying that when we come into this world, we are crying and everyone standing around us is smiling. It is up to us to live life in such a way that, at the end, we are smiling, and everyone around us is crying.

We have within us opposing forces that seek to build different legacies. Let us learn to manage these forces, balancing them to create a life that ignites more blessing. While we're still moving, let us live, grow, and leave behind a legacy of touched lives, of hearts healed, and the **reputation** we give to our most holy, a *ba'al shem tov/master of a good name. Gamar chatimah tovah, Shannah Tovah.*