

## RABBI'S MESSAGE

### TALMUDIC BILL PAYING

As we listen to the final blast of the shofar at the end of Yom Kippur, we can embrace another clean slate. It is a great opportunity to take some time and examine how we've been living our lives and how we plan to proceed in the future. This is called the Cheshbon Ha-Nefesh, or "accounting of the soul." By learning these concepts, we understand that we are accountable for our actions. At the beginning of the year, we can contemplate what we believe God expects of us, and what we expect of ourselves. The Talmud suggests that at the end of our days, we will be asked six questions to demonstrate our accomplishments in this world.

- 1) Were you honest in business?
- 2) Did you make time for learning?
- 3) Did you engage in procreation?
- 4) Did you hope for salvation?
- 5) Did you add to the wisdom of the world?
- 6) Did you have a mystical relationship with God?

(adapted from the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 31a)

While each of these questions may seem simple at first glance, they are questions we can all look at and commit ourselves to strive for positive outcomes.

Were you honest in business? All of us have business relationships, whether as consumers or proprietors. When we represent ourselves honestly, we are true to who we are. Our identity is sacred, and we must always be careful to represent ourselves that way.

Did you make time for learning? Pirke Avot (Ethics of our Fathers) says, "Do not say, 'When I have time, I will study,' because you will never have time." There are many avenues available to all of us for learning. We can learn from the Torah during Shabbat services, take a class, or merely engage others in conversations that involve thinking, listening and respecting the opinions of others.

Did you engage in procreation? This is not only about having children. Procreation, in this respect, means

promoting positive influence on others. Anyone who we encounter is someone who can learn from us. We have

engaged in procreation each time something we do or say has an influence on others. Therefore, we must be

careful about our words, because people are learning from us all the time.

Did you hope for salvation? The 10 Commandments has one commandment that is not about action, but about

emotion (Thou shalt not covet). Likewise, this list has one that is about emotion. Hope is something all of us can

do, but it is not always easy, especially when unspeakable things keep happening. I once heard a Holocaust

survivor answer the question, "Did you ever lose hope?" She said, "Hope is what kept us alive." Hope not only

keeps us alive, but it also helps us to really live.

Did you add wisdom to the world? Again, from Pirke Avot: "Who is wise? Those who can learn from everyone."

Each of us has something special to share. We never know when the things we take for granted may be just the

wisdom that someone else is looking for.

Did you have a mystical relationship with God? This may be the hardest one to measure, and clearly a life-long

pursuit. Our relationships with God are very much like our relationships with people: intangible connections that

include intense love and difficult challenges. When we remember that each human being is created in the image

of God, our human relationships become sacred.

The New Year is a perfect time to "check our balance" -- to see if we are paid up to date with these important

questions. Each of us can do our best to settle these accounts. If we have truly done our best, we can look at

ourselves in the mirror – seeing one of G-d's sacred creations – and feel debt-free.

Shana Tova, Rabbi Dan Gordon