

Weekly Teaching

September 14, 2018

On Yom Kippur, we imagine that God's "Book of Life"—God's plan for us this coming New Year—is about to be sealed.

The traditional Yom Kippur greeting we offer is "*Gemar Chatimah Tovah*"—"May you be granted a good closing seal."

This traditional Yom Kippur greeting is typical of the many other observances we practice during our High Holy Days.

Rosh Hashanah, and especially Yom Kippur, is dominated by our anticipating: "What will be written in our book of life for this New Year?"

When we sit in shul on Yom Kippur we are taking one last glance at the still blank pages, and we're really asking:

- *Who among us will leave this world, and who will be born?*
- *Who will live, and who will die?*
- *Who will die in the fullness of years, and who will die too early in their youth?*
- *Who will rest, and who will wander?*
- *Who will be serene, and who will be disturbed?*
- *Who will be at ease, and who afflicted?*
- *Who will be impoverished, and who enriched?*
- *Who will be humbled, and who exalted?*

And yet, our faith tells us there's still time; still time to change our Godly decree for the New Year.

We believe that our actions influence what God writes in our Book of Life.

Specifically, we believe there are four actions which can tip the divine scales of judgment in our favor: *Tseuvah*, *T'fillah*, *Tzedakah* and *Gemilut Hasadim*—Repentance, Prayer, Righteous Charitable Giving and our Acts of Kindness.

These four sacred actions can change, and even remove, God's stern decrees.

Tseuvah (our repentance) is the action where we learn from our past, so we can change our future.

T'fillot (our prayers) is how we search inside ourselves and reach out to partner with God so as to change our future.

Tzedakah (our righteous giving) is how it is that when we are generous with others we change our own future, and the future of so many others.

But, it is the fourth action, *Gemilut Hassadim* (our acts of kindness) which is most important.

Kindness has the greatest influence on our future.

On Yom Kippur, we are asked to realize that our acts of kindness have the greatest influence on our future.

As we consider our last opportunities this year to influence our fate for the New Year, we should really know that it's kindness that has the most power to influence God's decree.

Kindness is the highest expression of our humanity, and God looks kindly on our kindness.

When we are kind to strangers, they feel seen and heard.

When we are kind to our neighbors, they are more neighborly.

When we are kind to our family, they are more loving.

When we're kind to ourselves, we feel peace and self-acceptance

The quality of our life today is the result of our acts of kindness yesterday. And the quality of our life in the New Year will be the result of our acts of kindness today.

Acts of kindness are so important that the Talmud says "We're forbidden to interrupt an act of kindness."

So even if the sun is setting for the Sabbath, even if the kindness could be postponed, completing an act of kindness supersedes ritual law.

Kindness is so important to God that the Torah itself begins and ends with God's acts of kindness.

At the beginning of the Torah, God looks at the nakedness of Adam and Eve, and, in an act of kindness, God makes clothes to protect them from the cold.

At the end of the Torah, when Moses dies, God personally buries him.

In an act of kindness, God lays Moses to rest so he eternally looks over Israel; the Promised Land.

According to our faith, the Torah begins and ends with God's acts of kindness because we are to be in the image of God, and God's greatest virtue is "giving to others."

The Talmud says acts of kindness are like "the outstretched hand of God."

It takes so little effort, yet we see how much good comes from even the smallest acts of kindness. And, what a difference it makes when our hearts are open and our hands are outstretched.

Our kindness is the highest expression of our humanity and God sees our acts of kindness, and the good we do.

When we perform acts of kindness, we change the fate of others for the coming year and, in doing so, we change our own fate for the coming year.

God looks kindly on kindness.

God lessens the severity of our decree.

There's still time to change our future with the acts of kindness we make today.

Shabbat Shalom & *Gemar Chatimah Tovah*—May God grant each of us a good closing seal, and a New Year of goodness, happiness and kindness.

Amen!

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