

The Seven Questions You're Asked In Heaven

Rabbi Michael Lotker

I hope that you will remember that this is the topic I spoke about on Erev Rosh Hashanah. In the anticipation (and the hope) that many of you would want to have a copy of these questions, I thought I would provide them for you in this article. As I mentioned, these questions are the subject of a wonderful book that I recommend to you all. It's called *The Seven Questions You're Asked in Heaven: Reviewing & Renewing Your Life on Earth*, by Dr. Ron Wolfson of the American Jewish University and published by Jewish Lights Publishing.

So here's the list of the seven questions:

1. Did you deal honestly with people in your business practices? Yes, the very first question that you will be asked will be about your business ethics – how you treated others that you dealt with on a day to day basis. It saddens me to no end that religious Jews are not automatically associated with ethical behavior. This kind of behavior is especially important for Reform Jews.

2. Did you busy yourself with procreation? This is not only an issue for those of us who have been able to biologically reproduce. Jewish tradition holds that when one is a teacher or a mentor to another, it is deemed as though that person is the spiritual parent of the other. And please note that the question is not did you love your children or your family but did you busy your self with them. Did you spend the time and energy with them that you know you should?

3. Did you set times for Torah? Rabbi Louis Finkelstein once said that prayer is how we talk with God and study is how we hear God's voice. Looking back on my own 61 years, I can tell you that nothing in my life has been so life changing, so critical to my becoming who I am as the regular study of God's teachings. And it just so happens that we at Temple Ner Ami provide you with lots of opportunities to do so. Thursday Lunch n Learn from 12:30 – 2PM each week, Saturday morning Torah study with coffee and bagels each and every Shabbat morning from 9:30-11AM, our Jewish Literacy Class Thursday evenings at 7PM and Student Rabbi Lisa's Musar class to begin on October 15th.

4. Did you hope for deliverance? This is one I think and talk about all the time. God will want to know were you an optimist or a pessimist? Was the glass half full or half empty or – in the words of the Psalmist – was your cup overflowing? I believe that the central teaching of Judaism is that although God could have created the world as a world of perfection, that instead God only began the process and chose us to be partners in the perfection of God's creation. The biblical stories of God's involvement with the Israelites shows us that God cares passionately with how we turn out – God cares, God inspires, God rejoices and cries with us, God hopes with us even as we hope with God for a better world for us and for all the world.

5. Did you seek wisdom – did you understand one thing from another? This question asks us about our priorities in life. Did we spend our time seeking wisdom – *chochma* – the kind of wisdom gained from experience. Did we *havanta* – this comes from the same Hebrew root as the word *maven* – did we gain understanding from our experience to become a *maven* at living? This makes us focus not only on learning but on learning in order to make choices about how we live our lives. As Rabbi Wolpe teaches, another way to interpret this question is “When you look at your life, did you get your priorities straight.”

6. Were there earthly pleasures permitted to you that you did not enjoy? I love this one. The idea is that God has created a veritable smorgasbord of permitted delights (sorry, it’s only the permitted ones that we are talking about) for us to enjoy and, just as you mom told you way back when, you don’t have to eat everything but you should, at least, taste everything. If our love for God might be expressed in the answer to the other questions, God’s love for us is captured in this one.

7. Were you the best you you could be? God doesn’t expect you to be perfect. God doesn’t expect you to be another Albert Einstein or another Martin Luther King or another Abraham Lincoln. God created you to be *you*. If you don’t do the work that God intended for you to do who will do it? But we must be the best, most complete person we can be.

Whether you take this teaching literally or figuratively, the bottom line on it and on Judaism is that we are taught that God cares passionately how we live our lives. God has entrusted to us God’s world to care for and to improve and even to perfect. We trust our souls to God in the next world. But we just might have to answer a few questions when we get there.