

## **Preparing for the High Holy Days is Like Preparing for Your Funeral**

I hope the title caught your interest. Yes, the High Holy Days or *Yamim Ha-nohrah-im* (literally “the Days of Awe”) are, in a way, about preparing for your funeral. We are reminded about this with the numerous references to the book of life as well as by the haunting prayer, the *Unetaneh Tokef*, which asks us to reflect on the possibility that these High Holy Days may be our last. “On Rosh Hashanah it is written, on Yom Kippur it is sealed: how many shall pass on, how many shall come to be; who shall live and who shall die...”

The imagery of these days is that of a trial. On Rosh Hashanah, we praise God as King (or “ruler” in gender neutral terms) far more often than at other services. God is seated on the throne of judgment and we are on trial for our lives. A preliminary decision is rendered on that day but final appeals and sentencing are suspended for 10 days during which “repentance, prayer and charity temper the severity of the judgment.” If you were indeed on trial for your life, if you were indeed facing your own death, how would you prepare?

Traditionally, the days leading up to these High Holy Days, should be filled with introspection. “Whom have I hurt? Where have I gone wrong? How can I apologize? How can I make things better?” During the month of Elul we begin this work with the reminder of the shofar being blown at every service (appropriately enough, Elul begins this year on August 21<sup>st</sup>). This is the time to make lists, call the people that are important in your life and break out the tissues.

More often than I’d like, I’m called upon to help you and your families prepare for funerals. Sometimes, I’m given the privilege of calling upon you on your death bed. Whatever the circumstances, at these times I hear a lot about loves in your life, dreams fulfilled and unfulfilled, and the funny, wonderful things that make up relationships. Too often, I hear the ache of “if only we’d had more time,” “if only I’d said,” if only I’d done.”

Well guess what? You have the time. Now. Today. But especially in this month of Elul. Your funeral is coming; only God knows when -- but we all know that it’s coming; statistically speaking, the death rate is 100%. If you take seriously the work of the High Holy Days, I can promise you that you will have a more meaningful experience in early October as we once again gather to read the words and chant the melodies. But far more importantly, I can promise that you will create some beautiful chapters in your own book of life and ensure that your memory will be a blessing to those who care about you.