

**FIVE KEYS**  
**KOL NIDRE 5777**  
**By Rabbi Robert H. Loewy**

When King Solomon was a young man, life was good. He had health, wealth, wine, women and song, as he wrote Shir Hashirim, the Book of Biblical love poetry, attributed to him. With maturity he gained wisdom and perspective on the world, writing the Book of Proverbs. But as he entered his later years, knowing he was closer to the end of life than the beginning, he became dejected. From the Book of Ecclesiastes we read: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.".. "Eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we shall die."... "Dust we are and unto dust we shall return." Perhaps this pessimism was understandable and inevitable with his vigor abated, a family in turmoil and his kingdom on the verge of collapse.

On this Yom Kippur, a day which the Rabbis envisioned as a rehearsal for our last days on earth, I'm here to say, that pessimism need not be our approach to whatever days we have, be they many or not as many. Our liturgy reminds us that we never know when that day will come. My big question for this evening is, "How will you live in the time that you do have?" During the next few minutes, I will speak, but I am also going to give you the gift of silence, an opportunity to reflect upon what I hope will be helpful questions.

The starting point of Yom Kippur is forgiveness. Our relationships are critical to living each day and if we allow our anger, resentment and estrangements to dominate us, then we embitter ourselves and cannot move forward. So, to begin this evening, I ask you to think:

1. With whom do I remain angry, resentful, alienated?
2. Where does the wrong truly lie? Might there have been shared responsibility for the events that unfolded?
3. Have I attempted reconciliation? If so, what happened? If not, why not?

Instead of allowing grievances to keep us up at night, let me offer you the following bedtime prayer: "I now forgive all those who have hurt me, all who have done me wrong, whether deliberately or by accident, whether by word, by deed or by thought, whether against my pride, my person or my property. May no one be punished on my account." We then continue by asking forgiveness for what we may have done. (p. 143- Wise Aging) Try it. You may sleep better too.

Dealing with forgiveness is all about confronting our yesterdays. What I choose to emphasize this evening is how we will face our tomorrows. While my focus is particularly during these Holy Days is upon those of us carrying or eligible for our AARP or Medicare Cards, the wisdom speaks to us all. William F. May suggests that we consider aging to be a mystery, rather than a problem. Often he says, the question we need to ask is "How are we going to behave toward it?" rather than "What are we going to do about it?"

Let me suggest five keys which can lead to meaningful life, regardless of age or stage, but poignantly so for the older cohort dealing with challenges of health; shifts in family roles- caring for parents, children and grandchildren; children and grandchildren

carrying for you; retirement from lifelong occupations, loss of loved ones- family and friends; adapting to new communities, dealing with new doctors, lawyers, bankers, accountants as those you used forever have changed; or fears for the future, both financial and physical. These keys come from our Jewish tradition of musar- moral maxims and ideals to help us navigate our days.

Gratitude- Hodaah is our starting point, being thankful for what we have, which may be all that there will be for some of us, as opposed to focus on what we lack. A morning prayer expresses: "Ilu Finu.. If our mouths were full of praise for all we received, we still could not thank You enough." "By contemplating the possibility that we already have what we need, we can approach a state of true gratitude." (p. 176- Wise Aging)

This includes the idea of being grateful even when life is dark. I might be ill, but I have great doctors or friends to help. I lost a loved one, but I am blessed with supportive family. A relationship has ended, but this opens the door to new connections. A Buddhist teacher, Judy Lief, goes so far as to teach, "Be grateful for annoying people.. "Without them how could we practice patience, exertion, mindfulness, loving-kindness or compassion?" Find the good for which you can be grateful each day, as well as under trying circumstances.

Reflect upon the following:

1. What are two big blessings in my life?
2. Two little blessings in my life.
3. What's something surprising for which I am now grateful?

Our second key is Generosity. Perhaps this says something about what it means to be a Jew, when four different Hebrew words cover our one English expression: "Nedivut- pledged giving; tzedakah- doing what is right and just; terumah- donating from the heart; gemilut chasadim- acts of loving kindness." When one is generous with time, energy, attention, wealth or wisdom, it is not only beneficial to others, but as studies have shown, it redounds positively upon the donor spiritually and even physically.

While certainly many projects create positive tangible results. Let me also share that you never know when you are going to make a difference. Recently I encountered a woman in her early 40s, who informed me that a comment I made over 20 years ago, at Jacobs Camp prior to their mitzvah day, influenced her ultimate course in life. I had casually mentioned that doing for others did not have to be a one day experience, that in fact, some people do it professionally. She distinctly remembered that lesson and now works for Volunteers of America. What you give, say and do makes a difference.

We have wonderfully generous members at Gates of Prayer, who financially support the congregation and many worthy programs in the community. Our Jewish value is to donate what you can afford. Equally needed are those who are generous with their time and energy: answering phones, ushering each week, planning events, serving on committees and task forces. Generosity helps others and lifts those who engage. So ask yourself:

1. How does it feel when I act generously?
2. What limits my desire to be generous?
3. How can I be more generous?

There I was last week, sitting at my desk my phone call on hold by Social Security, told that they would answer in... 45 minutes. (No, they did not say leave my name and they would call back, or if they did I missed that prompt.) Was I surprised at this? Not really... just a bit annoyed. It was time for the third key: Savlanut- Patience. The word comes from the verb "Lisbol- to suffer." OK, this was not extreme suffering. Rather, it was typical of everyday frustrations. More often than not, our reactions to these momentary annoyances color how we react to the world.

I'm not advocating for passivity in critical moments. There are times to be assertive, but being appropriately patient will improve our days. There are some aspects of life over which we do not have control. Being angry or anxious will not make the phone ring, the traffic ease or the line in front of us move faster. This is something we should all learn at an early age. As we grow older, we may require an extra measure of patience for new challenges. This includes patience with our partners and peers, whose habits may annoy us, who with age may be slower in response; patience with ourselves when our bodies do not heal as quickly as they once did or we can't immediately remember that fact; patience with others who may not understand what we are trying to accomplish or who do not respond as quickly as we might like.

By the way, I was not surprised that I would have to wait 45 minutes. I had made sure my phone was charged, put it on speaker and had other work to do while waiting. We can prepare to be patient. Here come our questions for reflection:

1. When am I most patient? Least patient?
2. How would having more patience improve the quality of my life?
3. What steps can I take to be more patient?

"Ivdu et Adonai b'simcha- Serve God with Joy" is our mandate from the Book of Psalms. I can't command you to find joy, but I can certainly encourage you to be open to it, not just during the milestones, but also in everyday moments. Last week when walking with a young mother, who had come to pick up her little one from our after-school program, she said, "This is the best part of my day." I sort of understood. We then turned the corner and her son happened to be walking down the hallway with his teacher. As soon as he saw her, his face beamed with an expression of pure joy that radiated to all of us, as he toddled forward as fast as his little feet and legs could go and flung himself into a hug.

Being joyful is a mindset. It is an approach to our world and the daily events we experience. Think of simcha as an energy force that comes from within. It's always there for us to plug into. Yes, there will be sad and difficult times, but we do not have to let them define us. Composer Debbie Friedman wove two verses from Psalms into one song: "Those who sow in tears will reap in joy." (126:5) with "You turn my mourning into dancing; you undid my sackcloth and girded me with joy (30:12)." That can be our reality, if we allow it to be.

Joy does not always come easily. Depression, anxiety, jealousy, anger, selfishness can all be barriers. But if we are aware of it, then we can overcome these obstacles, sometimes simply by force of will. Scientific studies have shown, if you smile

more often, choose to laugh more regularly, it will help you both anatomically and spiritually. So, I now ask you to consider:

1. Recall a time I smiled or experienced deep joy?
2. What blocks to experiencing joy can I find in myself?
3. Can I be joyful for others?

For our last key, I invite you to envision the iconic “scales of justice” to represent finding balance in life. “Sheleimut” related to “Shalom,” means equanimity/inner peace. This value reminds us not to rise too high when all goes well or sink too low when events turn badly. Within each of us is the ability to confront whatever life throws our way. Psychologist Viktor Frankl writes, “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” (Man’s Search for Meaning)

One primary source of equanimity is the self. Have the confidence to know that you have the ability to roll with the punches. “Gam zeh yaavor” is the helpful saying... “This too shall pass.” Of course, another source for some is faith, a connection with God, a sense that there is something bigger than us, a Rock upon whom we can depend, a Loving Guiding Presence beyond our understanding. Let us reflect:

1. In what circumstances do I find my equanimity most tested?
2. In what ways does experiencing great good in my life, challenge my equanimity?
3. How do I keep my balance?

In some ways Solomon may have been right. “All is vanity” when you live solely for yourself, failing to be grateful for blessings or generous to others. Yes, “Eat drink and be merry.” Find joy in life, even during darker moments. Utilize patience to deal with the big and little frustrations that come our way. “Dust we are and unto dust we return.” Rather than pessimism, let this awareness prompt us to seek reconciliation with those we have wronged and grant forgiveness to those who have wronged us. As God judges us and we evaluate ourselves, may we achieve equanimity. As we begin our day of fasting and reflection, may we gain insights for our tomorrows.

AMEN

Much of this sermon is based upon the books, “Wise Aging-Living with Joy, Resilience and Spirit” by Rabbi Rachel Cowan and Dr. Linda Thal and “Seekers of Meaning- Baby Boomers, Judaism and the Pursuit of Healthy Aging” by Rabbi Richard E. Address.

**FACING REALITY**  
**ROSH HASHANAH MORNING 5777**  
**By Rabbi Robert H. Loewy**

This past summer, while introducing myself to a gathering of the Men of Reform Judaism, I described myself as I have for years, saying, "I am a Reform Movement Boy-raised at a Reform synagogue, a product of the Reform youth movement and seminary." As the words left my mouth, I realized how silly they were. I have not been a "boy" in quite some time.

In presenting to the congregation why we have an Assistant Rabbi, I only somewhat facetiously say, "Can you imagine, I'm no longer the new young Rabbi?" In my mind's eye, I'm still a boy, the young rabbi who came here 33 years ago. Then I look in a mirror. Who is that man who looks just like my father? It is time for me to face reality. I'm not a boy, the new young rabbi or for that matter, what many consider to be young. Our octogenarian and nonagenarians might differ. With our High Holy Days being a time of reflection, I'm not complaining or remorseful. Rather, I am fine with where I am in life, accepting the passage of the years, anticipating the future with excitement and a measure of trepidation.

I know many of you are at a similar stage in life. Reflecting national patterns, approximately 60% of our congregation is 60 years of age or older. Responding to this reality, we are now offering a variety of programs and activities that will help in facing the future: Dor HaBet, our baby-boomers social group; Sisterhood and Brotherhood programs that have focused on issues of health and wellness; Senior Outreach, a monthly luncheon with entertainment and informative programs, and for this coming year, a series entitled, M'vakshim/Seekers: Exploring the Opportunities of Aging. We already held one evening of candid discussion on what it means to be getting older. Future sessions throughout the year, will focus on our changing relationships with others and God. A Scholar in residence weekend in January will feature Rabbi Richard Address, an amazing, engaging, hilarious teacher on what he calls Sacred Aging. This morning and during Yom Kippur, I will use my opportunity to speak to you, my beloved congregation, on different aspects of the subject. I believe this will not only be directly relevant to the older age group, but also important for the family and friends of those who are aging, plus a few nuggets of insight that speak to all, no matter our age.

A few weeks ago, when I told my son David the topic for my sermons, his compassionate loving response was, "You already told me that Pop." OK, maybe I repeat myself more than I used to. And then there are those other memory issues that are normal with years. I'm trying to recall someone's name. I can tell you what the person looks like, aspects of her life story, who she is related to, what she does... but it may be a few seconds, minutes or hours before the name comes to mind. On the one hand, the loss of instant recall may be frustrating, but I have come to accept it as a reality, and feel a sense of triumph when the name or factoid I was seeking arrives. There are some challenges in life that we can combat, while others that we simply must accept and adapt.

In that same conversation with my son, I mentioned my hesitancy to go and gut houses after the flooding in Baton Rouge. I told him, "What my body could do 11 years ago may not be what I can do today." He was kinder in his response this time, saying

“You may be in better shape today, than you were then.” This is something I have been working on. I am fully aware that there are no guarantees, but I want to do what I can to be in the position to enjoy fullness of years. Much of how we see ourselves relates to our bodies.

Briut is our mitzvah/value of taking care of the body. It involves eating wisely, exercising appropriately, engaging our minds, and receiving regular medical check-ups and care. This will not prevent the inevitable, but can help in staving it off longer. It's never too late to begin, but the earlier you start, the better off you will be.

Shortly after we began our worship this morning, we read, what is sometimes referred to as “the bathroom prayer.” We give thanks to God, who created our amazingly intricate bodies, with intermeshed organs, pathways and openings. We acknowledge that when one of them malfunctions, it is impossible to stand before (yes, this is what it says) “Kise K'vodecha... your Throne of glory.” “Blessed are You, who heals all flesh, working wondrously.”

Illness is a reality for all of us. The older we become, the more common it is to be dealing with maladies for us and our loved ones: knees, shoulders and hips need replacement; veins and arteries clog; disease attacks the body and the mind. In a few minutes, we will recite the Misheberach prayer for healing. Note, it is healing that we seek, with two components. We want refuat haguf, the body to be healed, the cancer to shrink, the heart to pump strongly, the dementia to abate, and the amazing new joint to provide mobility. Isn't it amazing when we think of the wonderful advances in medicine! But sometimes, there can be no cure and so we also seek refuat hanefesh, healing of the spirit, which is possible, regardless of how the body responds to treatment.

As your rabbi, I am privileged, and I do mean privileged, to be with you in some of your darkest hours. In those moments, I have witnessed refuat hanefesh, inspiring examples of courage, humor that enables coping, compassionate caring, communal support, spiritual quest and growth, and the ability to adapt to the changing circumstances of life. Reality- we will all die one day, but before that day comes, there is lots of living to be done.

The Psalmist (90:12) instructs: “Teach us to number our days that we may attain a heart of wisdom.” In other words, no matter our age, we are called upon to make each day count. Abraham Joshua Heschel, in his book, “To Grow in Wisdom,” applies this idea to those in their later stages of life when he writes: “These years are indeed formative years, rich in possibilities... to deepen understanding and compassion, to widen the horizon of honesty, to refine the sense of fairness... one ought to enter old age, the way one enters the senior year of a university, in exciting anticipation of consummation... but the attainment of wisdom is the work of a lifetime.”

Society does not always make it easy. As opposed to the Biblical teaching to “rise up before the aged and show deference to the elder,” (Leviticus 19:32) ageism is common. It is a negative attitude and a form of discrimination that does not receive nearly the attention that it deserves. While most seniors are mentally and physically active with a great deal to contribute, there are all too many jokes, which make fun of diminished capacities; numerous moments of interaction when it is assumed that because one is older, then he/she must be slow to understand; And discrimination in employment is rampant, both forcing people out before they are ready or not considering them when they are seeking to continue work. There are clear and cogent

reasons that organizations like AARP were created. (By the way, you can join starting at age 50.) Clearly, this problem is not something new, since the Psalmist (71) pleads: "Do not cast me off in old age, when my strength fails, do not forsake me." Let us recognize this societal ill and take steps to combat it.

Sometimes we can be our own worst enemies, as we internalize negative stereotypes and attitudes. The Book of Ecclesiastes, reputedly written by King Solomon towards the end of his life, reflects this when we read, (Chap. 12) "So appreciate your vigor in the days of your youth, before those days of sorrow come and those years arrive of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them." I describe this as the "doom and gloom approach to growing older." Yet, in the same chapter, we find the antidote to this negativity in the words: "One generation goes, another comes, but the earth remains the same forever." I describe this as the "big picture approach." Each of us needs to see ourselves as if we are part of one great, ongoing continuum.

It is one of the reasons why we will be reading from the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis in a few minutes. Once Adam is created, he is placed in the Garden of Eden and told to enjoy all the fruit of the trees, just not from the Tree of Knowledge. Then the next comment is *Lo tov heyot Adam l'vado*- It is not good for Adam, the primordial human, to be alone. I will make him a help-mate." One of the common themes I have heard from some of our members is that they feel alone. A life partner has died. Friends have moved away or are no longer available. A career or job, which was the center of activity, has ended. Children, if so blessed, have moved elsewhere or are appropriately busy in their activities. Physical limitations curtail mobility. All of these can lead to loneliness, that feeling of separation from others, isolation, even abandonment. In response to this, Rabbi Heschel teaches, "The way to overcome loneliness is not to wait for a donation of companionship, but rather by offering companionship and meaning to others."

I was blessed to see this concept in action with my parents, *alav hashalom*. With their three children living elsewhere, downsized to an apartment after over fifty years in one home, career ended due to reaching maximum age and outliving most of their friends, they had to recreate themselves. While maintaining relationships of a lifetime, they also made new friends and connections, by necessity comparatively younger people, and did for others as they could, which was reciprocated in kind. This did not just start in their 80s, but earlier, as they embraced their future, inclusive of inevitable challenges, such as when they could no longer drive, they found alternative means to get around. Their example informs my perspective.

After years of constantly being on the go, years when we might often have appreciated a little peace and quiet, later years provide opportunities for solitude. This is where one learns to enjoy being alone, not having to interact with others all the time to feel fulfilled. At a local restaurant the other night, I saw an older man, sitting by himself. At first I thought, "How sad! He is alone." Then I realized that he was a "regular." All the wait staff knew and greeted him warmly. He seemed relaxed and at ease, enjoyed his sushi and had a book with him to pass the time. He was alone, but not lonely. In Jewish tradition, *hitbodedut*, spiritual practices for being alone with yourself and God, provide a model for being at one with yourself.

Initially God provided Adam with pets as helpmates. I know how special pets can be to provide companionship for many. Then came Chava and the two were immortal.

Only after eating from the Tree of Knowledge does that change. It is at that point, God asks: "Ayecha?- Where are you?" This was not a form of playing hide and seek, but the opportunity to pose one of the most fundamental of all questions. As we experience our High Holy Days, challenging ourselves is the norm.

Let me offer a few corollary questions, for which I do not have definitive answers, thoughts, yes, but nothing absolute, since each of us must answer in our own way. However, I have discovered that often simply asking the important questions precipitates thoughts, reflection and action. Again, let me stress, that while many of these questions are pertinent to our older cohort, they are relevant to all of us, no matter our age or stage:

- Ayecha? Where are we in terms of dealing with where we are today in life? How would we like to fill our days with meaning? What can we take from the world around us? What can we give?
- Ayecha? For those entering a new phase of life, what adjustments are we willing to make? Adaptations that we will need to embrace? Will this new life stage propel us to change our life course and embark on paths of life that, up to now, had been merely the stuff of dreams and fantasy?
- Ayecha? For those who have reached three score, three score and ten or more than four score years, can we shift our thinking from a paradigm of decline to one of opportunity? Can we embrace our mortality with a sense of contentment?

Chaim Potok writes: "Human beings do not live forever. We live less than the time it takes to blink an eye, if we measure our lives against eternity. So it may be asked, 'what value is there to human life... if our lives are nothing more than a blink of an eye?' A blink of an eye is nothing, but the eye that blinks, that is something. A span of life is nothing, but the person who lives that span, she is something. He can fill that tiny span with meaning, so its quality is immeasurable, though its quantity may be insignificant. A person must fill her life with meaning; meaning is not automatically given to life, it is hard to work to fill one's life with meaning.... A life full of meaning is worthy of rest. I want to be worthy of rest, when I am no longer here."

Friends, "Life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived." (Kurtz and Ketchum) Let us all dedicate ourselves to lead lives of meaning and be worthy of rest, whenever that time comes.

AMEN

Much of this sermon is based upon the books, "Wise Aging-Living with Joy, Resilience and Spirit" by Rabbi Rachel Cowan and Dr. Linda Thal and "Seekers of Meaning- Baby Boomers, Judaism and the Pursuit of Healthy Aging" by Rabbi Richard E. Address.

**THE JOURNEY**  
**YOM KIPPUR MORNING 5777**  
**By Rabbi Robert H. Loewy**

A popular poem begins, "Life is a journey from birth to death." Most of the time, our tendency is to emphasize the beginning and the journey itself, while ignoring the end. Today is different. Yom Kippur is the Holy Day, which the rabbis understood as a rehearsal for our day of death- no eating or drinking, wearing white, like a burial shroud, offering confession, being judged. As a counter-message, we will shortly read the Torah portion that calls upon us to Choose Life. Balancing the tension between these two, it is my goal this morning to encourage three types of significant conversations.

This will be the third of my High Holy Day messages, all dealing with the opportunities and issues of aging. Most of you have come to know me well. I preach based upon our tradition, but through the palette of my life. Lest some surmise I might have a health concern, I'm happy to say I do not, at least not yet. Rather, I am simply confronting the growing awareness that I am closer to Moses' lifespan of 120 years and am anticipating the coming years. This topic is directly relevant to those at a similar stage in life, but I believe for all of us as well.

The first conversation is with ourselves. There are a variety of questions and fears to acknowledge. When is the right time to retire, if at all? Some choose to work until they can physically no longer do so. For others, retirement from work is already the reality. From the practical perspective will be economic issues: Will I need to cut back or have I saved enough to complete my years in comfort and security? To the younger folks... start saving more now for peace of mind later.

A significant issue is that of identity. For some, we are our work. Our jobs significantly define how we see ourselves and others see us. There are those who can wean from their professions, while others, by design or against their will, have to stop, cold turkey. In either situation, forethought will make the process smoother. Yes, time will fill itself, but doing so with meaning will be better.

Choose life is our Torah theme of the morning. Yes, death is the end for us all, but how will we fill our days until that eventuality? Be good to yourself. Create your bucket list, but don't be a fanatic. Check off at least some of the items: travel to that long desired destination; take up the hobby you've wanted to pursue, but be open to mundane, everyday activity and take delight in those moments as well. Find a cause and make a difference, if not in the entire world, at least one person's world, other than yourself.

Most importantly, ask yourself: Who are, or have been, the significant people in your life? Then nurture, rekindle or repair those relationships. It's never too late! Yom Kippur screams that message to us. We simply have to be able to listen and act.

The second conversation relates to health. No matter how well we maintain our cars, they break down. Our bodies are no different. We simply have to accept it, embrace it, and plan for it as much as we can.

This conversation is not just with yourself, but also among spouses, partners, children or friends, those for whom we care or will be in the position to watch over us. Today, more and more families are involved in multi-generational caring: first themselves, but also parents for children, adult children for older parents, older parents

for their children and sometimes grand, even great grandchildren. Where once we talked about the “sandwich generation,” Rabbi Richard Address refers to this as the club-sandwich generation.

Lynn and I fall in this category. Recently, our family celebrated my mother-in-laws 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Surrounded by her three daughters, two sons-in-law, eight grandchildren and five great grandchildren, we paused from the partying to formally review her life accomplishments and how everyone felt about her. Yes, it was akin to hearing a eulogy while still alive. Overwhelmed she shared, “I had no idea that you appreciated all that I did.” She then pointed out a few omissions that she wanted in that future oration.

As a guiding principle on how intergenerational relations should work, Torah teaches that we are to both “revere” and “honor” our parents. According to the Talmud, “reverence” means, a child must never sit or stand in the parent’s place, nor contradict their words. Don’t worry about the literal meaning here, but rather the spirit, which is all about dignity for those who are aging. “Honor” is more practical. Children must provide parents with food, drink, clothing and shelter. (Talmud Kiddushin 31b)

A Talmudic tale describes two men, both sons. One provides his father with all of his basic needs as prescribed. The second puts his father to work in a mill. Yet, the rabbis say that the second merits Gan Eden, the world to come, but not the first. Why? It is the second who created the situation for the father to live meaningfully, preserving his dignity, while the first met the letter of the law, but not the spirit.

The basis of the conversation between caregivers and those for whom they are or one day will be caring starts with these foundational values, respect and honor, preserving dignity and meeting needs. It is somewhat of a given that most people want to be independent and self-sufficient for as long as they can. Discuss in advance, what financial arrangements you have made, what your wishes are for living arrangements should incapacities arise. Most prefer to stay at home for as long as possible. However, Judaism has long understood the need for facilities of caring. I know there may be issues with specific institutions, but there are many good ones. I have seen individuals, who took the position, “no way am I ever going to assisted living or a nursing home,” who later discover how foolish they were. Previously isolated at home, they now have social contact and activity around them all the time.

The dance between caregivers and those who need care can often be awkward, as the balance of dignity with needs to be met can be stressful, but also fulfilling. I had a foreshadowing of what my future will be like a few years ago, when, as many of you will recall, I had a back problem. Thank God, that is behind me, but I remember two days after Yom Kippur that year, as I lay in pre-op, with one of my daughters taking charge, how touched and grateful I was. “Wise independence” is the ability to acknowledge one’s limitations, while accepting needed help with appreciation. On the other side, those who provide care, though challenging and stressful, report how fulfilling it is for them to do so. Giving and receiving care can be mutually beneficial.

A few years ago, I created a booklet for our congregation, entitled Ayt Lamut. From Ecclesiastes, we learn, “there is a time to be born and, ayt lamut, a time to die.” It includes practical information about what to do when someone dies, but its purpose was for people to plan in advance. Discussing ultimate eventualities, does not hasten reality. You are not tempting the “Malach hamavet- the Angel of death,” anymore than buying insurance will make you sick. In addition to your legal wills, powers of attorney and

financial plans, I encourage you to discuss with those who will need to know, your wishes for future eventualities. Talk about funerals, funeral homes and cemeteries. While cremation is not encouraged in Jewish tradition, many opt for that alternative. Have a conversation. Note, I say conversation, because both future mourners and those who will be mourned have a say as to what happens. Then, go ahead and make pre-arrangements, so that when the time comes, most issues will have been addressed. Some people even prepare a bio for obituary and eulogy purposes. Keep in mind, you can continue to add to its content once written.

Another part of this conversation with others needs to include your thoughts about medical treatment. Situations arise, when important decisions have to be made. Jewish wisdom provides guidance. If one path can likely bring about healing, then it should be pursued. On the other hand, we are not required to employ all means to simply keep someone alive, delaying the inevitable. The problem arises with the in between dilemmas, where there might be healing, but quality of life is compromised. Loved ones need to know when or when not to apply DNR- Do not resuscitate, how far you want doctors to treat and when not to treat.

A sermon by Rabbi Judith Lazarus Siegal, brought the following story to my attention. Dr. Susan Block, a palliative care specialist, advises: "Don't ask, 'What is it that you want when you are dying,' but instead: 'If time becomes short, what is most important to you?'" Ten years ago, her seventy-four year old father was admitted to a San Francisco hospital with symptoms from what proved to be a mass growing in the spinal cord of his neck. The evening before the surgery, father and daughter chatted about friends and family, trying to keep their minds off what was to come, and then she left for the night. Halfway across the Bay Bridge, she realized, "Oh God, I don't know what he really wants." He had made her his health care proxy, but they had talked about such situations only superficially. So Dr. Block turned the car around.

Going back was "really uncomfortable," she said. It made no difference that she was an expert in end-of-life discussions. "I just felt awful having the conversation with my dad." But she went through her list. She told him, "I need to understand how much you are willing to go through to have a shot at being alive and what level of being alive is tolerable to you." We had this quite agonizing conversation where he said-and this totally shocked me: "Well, if I'm able to eat chocolate ice cream and watch football on TV, then I'm willing to stay alive. I'm willing to go through a lot of pain if I have a shot at that."

"I would never have expected him to say that." Block went on. "I mean, he's a professor emeritus. He's never watched a football game in my conscious memory. The whole picture - it wasn't the guy I thought I knew." But the conversation proved critical, because after surgery he developed bleeding of the spinal cord. The surgeons told her that, in order to save his life, they would need to go back in. But he had already become nearly quadriplegic and would remain severely disabled for many months and possibly forever. What did she want to do?

"I had three minutes to make this decision, and I realized, he had already made the decision." She asked the surgeons whether, if her father survived, he would still be able to eat chocolate ice cream and watch football on TV. Yes, they said. She gave the OK to take him back in the Operating Room. One conversation can make all the difference.

Our last conversation for this morning is with God. Just as there are no atheists in fox holes, for many, the closer one is to the end of life, the more we may find ourselves talking to God. If you have been in dialogue throughout your days, then it can be easier towards the end, but it's never too late.

When young, many of us do not think about afterlife, but towards the end, reflecting upon God's judgment and eternity become more prominent in our thoughts.

There are even new rituals and prayers that have been created to respond to our changing reality. For example, when my parents moved from their house of over 50 years, they recited the following:

"Our God, we give thanks for the years that we have spent living in this house. When we entered, so many years ago, it was merely stucco and mortar. Over time this house has become our home. Our home has been filled with laughter and joy, the beauty of holiness and the warmth of love. As we recall the years, we realize that the words of Torah have been fulfilled: we have been blessed as we came in and continue to be blessed as we go forth. On this day we thank You for all of these blessings." Later that day, we affixed a mezuzah on their new apartment.

I am optimistic to say that an ancient, but new ritual tool will soon be available to our community. A new Community Mikvah will provide opportunities for immersion in the mayim chaim, living waters, for not only customary uses, but also at times of retirement, the end of a mourning period, each new grand or great grandchild or following positive medical news. We will only be limited in its use by our ritual creativity.

We of course turn to God with our prayers for healing and wholeness, for the strength to face life's physical challenges, but also to express gratitude for life's blessings. Each night as we go to bed, there is a custom that we practice for death. Last night I shared with you the bedtime version of Vidui, the prayer for confessing sins. This morning, let me add the idea of reciting Sh'ma Yisrael along with the last words of the Adon Olam prayer: B'yado afkid ruhee- I place my spirit in God's care, both when I sleep and when I wake, God is with me; I have no fear."

On this day of Yom Kippur, we are instructed to choose life, embrace it, enjoy it, live with meaning, but know that death is part of the continuum. Let us accept that reality, prepare for the eventuality, as we utilize whatever time we have meaningfully, in dialogue with ourselves, loved ones and God...Life is a journey, from birth to death, to life everlasting...

AMEN

Much of this sermon is based upon the books, "Wise Aging-Living with Joy, Resilience and Spirit" by Rabbi Rachel Cowan and Dr. Linda Thal and "Seekers of Meaning- Baby Boomers, Judaism and the Pursuit of Healthy Aging" by Rabbi Richard E. Address.