

LIFE'S PURPOSE

FIND YOUR
THIS ROSH HASHANA!

by Rabbi Aryeh Nivin

After six months of working for the company, it's time for your evaluation. You walk into the boardroom, where the stone-faced CEO is sitting behind a mahogany desk. After scanning your file, he looks up at you accusingly, and says, "I see here that you did not report for work at 9 a.m. once during this entire period." You shift uncomfortably in your chair. "Not only that," he continues, "but I'm sure you understand that this is a reputable company. Instead of a jacket and tie, you report for work wearing jeans!" The sweat begins to drip down your forehead. He continues to stare at the papers in his hand and finally says, grimly, "Our surveillance cameras show that you spend less than 10 percent of your working hours at your desk. The rest of the time you're walking around the building. Do you have anything to say for yourself?"

"Yes," you reply, suddenly regaining your confidence. "I was hired as the night watchman!"*

Elul and the *Yamim Norayim* are days of evaluation. But to accurately assess your performance this year, you have to know your job description. Your unique life's purpose is your job description in this world. On Rosh Hashana, Hashem apportions to each of us life, health, livelihood, and everything else. What is your plan for how you propose to use the life G-d gives you? The "CEO" is not

going to dole out a million-dollar budget to an employee who doesn't have a carefully worked-out proposal.

The Arizal writes that each person is totally unique and that each soul comes to do something specific that only he or she can do to make the world a better place. Throughout all of history, there never was and never will be anyone like you. If you don't fulfill your mission, no one else can do it for you.

Imagine that you are an undercover agent sent into Iran. You've had years of training in code breaking, martial arts and weaponry; you have developed vital insider contacts within the Iranian government; and are equipped with the latest hi-tech spy gadgetry. Only one thing is lacking: You have no idea what your mission is. The famous spy series "Mission Impossible" always started with the same opening line: "Your mission, Jim, should you choose to accept it, is..."

Without knowing your mission, you are doomed to failure. Knowing your purpose is the rocket fuel to drive you to a life of both spiritual and material success. The great chasidic master, Rabbi Zushe of Anipoli, often said, "When I come to the Next World and stand before the Heavenly Court, I do not fear the question, 'Why weren't you like Avraham Avinu or Moshe Rebbeinu?' I was not equipped to be Avraham or Moshe. But I tremble for the day when I will be asked: 'Why weren't you like Zushe?'" There's no excuse for not being yourself.

The Pleasure Principle

So how can we begin to discover our unique life's purpose? If this sounds like a daunting task, fear not; it is actually much easier than you think. You see, each of us is already endowed with an internal purpose detector that lets us know when we have found it. What is this detector? Pleasure. Pleasure is a tool that Hashem has created to alert us to the fact that we are nearing our life's purpose.

This obviously does not mean *any* pleasure. Enjoying the pleasure of good food does not mean that your life's purpose is to eat all day. On that same note, enjoying the deep inner peace experienced while watching the sunset, listening to music, or appreciating beauty also does not imply that you were created specifically for those things. These are universal pleasures that all human beings enjoy. The same applies for milestone events like graduations, weddings, and childbirth – all of which are powerful life experiences but not unique life-purpose pleasures.

The pleasure we are talking about is something that you connect to in a powerful way above and beyond the pleasure of those universal experiences. The key is to look for areas of life which are not necessarily universally-spiritual experiences, where you feel inspired, alive, confident,

*Story attributed to Sara Yoheved Rigler in Aish.com.

and content. When you experience your life's purpose, you think: "I could do this all day! I was created for this!"

Another tool to uncovering your purpose is to reflect upon what causes or creative outlets you are passionate about. Some people are so passionate about certain issues or artistic endeavors that it borders on obsession. You may have a passion for learning a certain section of Torah, playing music, painting, feeding the homeless, or studying the wonders of quantum physics. Assuming that it's coming from a healthy and balanced place – and that it sets off your *purpose-pleasure detector*, this cause or activity may indeed be your life's purpose.

It is different for everyone. Your purpose can be: 1) a form of creative expression like art, music, or craftsmanship; 2) fulfilling or encouraging others to fulfill a certain *mitzva*, like *tzedaka*, caring for disabled children, or running a *lashon hara* campaign; 3) mastering and/or disseminating knowledge, for example a

certain area of Torah learning, a particular book or *sefer*, or even general knowledge, such as the wonders of science or history; or 4) perfecting or inspiring others about a certain character trait or *midda* like kindness, joy, enthusiasm, or patience. Whether your mission is philanthropic, scholarly, or personal, bringing your special message to others will infuse your life with meaning and inspiration and make the world a better place.

It goes without saying that your individual purpose can never contradict the global purpose of the Jewish people – namely Torah and *mitzvos*. Within the framework of *halacha*, however, each of us can connect to completely different aspects of the rich spectrum of Jewish life and human experience, and each of us has his or her own talents to share with the world.

The previous Slonimer Rebbe, the Nesivos Sholom, explains in the name of earlier Rebbes that just as every person is completely different, so too every moment in time is completely unique. At

each moment we must ask ourselves what Hashem wants from us right now. If we use each moment as an opportunity to reveal an aspect of our divine soul to the world, we are truly living each moment to its fullest.

Now that we have the introductory tools, let's set aside a few minutes each day during the remaining days of Elul to think about our unique mission and purpose in life. Learning about our life's purpose is only beginning, however. The key is to start living it, so that we can go through life with confidence, knowing that we are using our potential to its fullest. And on Rosh Hashana, we can say before the Great Judge, "This is my job and I'm trying my best to fulfill it!" ♦

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