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Rosh Hashana Prescribing LIFE

Rabba Dr. Carmella Abraham
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The well-known Rosh Hashana liturgical petition “Inscribe us in the Book of Life” is found throughout the Rosh Hashana service and dates back to Talmudic times. The mystic Sefat Emet, Rabbi Judah Aryeh Leib Alter finds a deeper insight to this verse. G-d has engraved the word LIFE on each one of our hearts, he states, and over the year this engraving “comes to be covered with grit”. Our wrongdoings come to cover over the word of LIFE that is written so deeply in our hearts, eventually weighing us down so we are not actually able to live to our fullest. On Rosh Hashana we come before G-d to ask him to rewrite the word LIFE once again on our hearts and for it to be sealed by Yom Kippur.

I cannot help but think of the things that weigh heaviest on our hearts over the past year, and of the things that emerge, at the top of that list is the hurt that we inflict on one another. In fact, for many of us, our engraved “LIFE” has been covered in grit and dirt from not just this year but from dents and scrapes we have sustained over the course of many years from the unresolved issues and offenses amongst our family or friends. How many of us are entrenched in the same patterned relationships, locked in perpetual battles, which may ebb and flow year to year, or change in intensity, but exist nonetheless with no resolution in sight; parents who are unaccepting of our life choices or who still play favorites, a mother in law’s constant criticism of her daughter/ son in law, an estranged sibling, children who no longer communicate with their parents, “good friends” who have distanced themselves.

It is at this time, starting with the month of Elul, that we are tasked to take good look at this grit that keeps us from living- our inability to forgive those that have hurt us. With Rosh Hashanah we can begin to explore those things which hold us back, to hopefully reach resolution or begin a path towards resolution by Yom Kippur. Rabbi Stewart Weiss sees Yom Kippur as an opportunity to reconnect deeply with those we love. Rabbi Weiss translates *Yom Hakippurim* (Yom Kippur actually appears in Torah in this plural form) as “reconciliations” instead of the traditional translation of “atonements”. He writes *“This is the day to effect a reconciling of all our many relationships; to renew repair and recharge our connection with all those that are precious to us.”* It is a time to tell our spouses and children how much they mean to us, to thank our parents and in-laws for what they have given us and to embrace and reconnect with our friends and community. As hard as it may be, we are charged to extend forgiveness to our family and friends so we can live fully again, so that we can experience the LIFE that has been engraved on our hearts, the LIFE we were meant to live. May we all be inscribed in the Book of LIFE, Amen.



Rabba Dr. Carmella Abraham feels blessed to have the privilege of living her two callings as both a doctor and a member of the Orthodox clergy. Rabba Carmella has interned at the Hillels of Westchester, Columbia Presbyterian Hospital Chaplaincy Program and served as a Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Created Equal Seminar Fellowship. Rabba Carmella earned her bachelor’s degree from Barnard College and her medical degree from Mount Sinai School of Medicine. She practiced at the Women’s Health Program, where she held a dual appointment in Internal Medicine and Obstetrics and Gynecology. She currently works in Oncology Medical Affairs for pharma. Rabba Carmella is married to physician Dr. Steven Kubersky and has three children.