

(These questions originally were based on a selection from *IN CONTEXT* Number 26, Summer, 1990, pp. 50-51 that appeared in Moments of Transcendence: Supplement 1991. I have also found questions in the writings of many colleagues as well as developing my own.)

QUESTIONS FOR A NEW YEAR – 5768

God asks four questions in the early chapters of the book of Genesis:

Where are you? (3:9)
Where is Abel your brother? (4:9)
Where are you coming from? (16:8)
Where are you going? (16:8)

Judaism values knowing the right questions to ask, more than knowing the right answers to give. There are many who view Rosh Hashanah as an answer. We come to pray for life, for health, for love, for contentment, for success. But we might benefit more, if we were to view Rosh Hashanah as a time to ask a series of questions. What is the meaning of life? Why is there suffering? What is the measure of success? What is our relationship with God? Why do we really come to the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur?

On Rosh Hashanah eve, as a New Year is about to begin, I prepare questions, both old and new and modified, as tools for reflection. Each question could be a starting point for self-examination leading to teshuvah, making the kind of changes that this season encourages.

What was your greatest achievement in this past year?

What was your greatest disappointment in this past year?

What in this last year brought you the most joy?

What in this last year brought you the most regret?

How much time did you waste last year?

How much non productive time did you spend on a computer last year?

How much time did you waste on a cell phone talking or text messaging last year?

Is it really important to be “phone available” 24-7?

Can you live without your “Blackberry”?

Do you ever turn off your cell phone or Blackberry without being specifically asked to do so?

What project or goal, if left undone, will you most regret next Rosh Hashanah?

The kind deed: did you perform it or postpone it?

The unnecessary criticism or insult: did you say it or hold it back?

Are you content with where you are “at” today?

Where would you like to be “at” five years from now?

How do you balance your needs with the needs of those closest to you?

Should we withdraw from Iraq immediately?

Should we use our military power to stop the genocide in the Sudan?

Should we use our military power in Iran?

Where do you feel safe?

How do the victims of AIDS in Africa compare to the victims of natural disasters or genocides?

How do the poor and homeless of the Lehigh Valley compare to victims of natural disasters or genocides?

Do you think that there is still racism in the United States?

Do you believe in Global warming?

What are you willing to sacrifice to reduce the effects of Global warming?

Did you replace even one incandescent bulb in your home with a CFL?

Should we outlaw SUVs and other vehicles that use large amounts of gasoline?

What would you be willing to sacrifice to help preserve limited natural resources?

Is it worse to pay \$3 for a gallon of gasoline or for a cup of coffee?

Are there any ideals or causes for which you would be willing to die?

What does patriotism mean in 2007?

Do you vote?

If you are unhappy with the politicians in office, would you run in their place?

Why do so many worry more about themselves than about the community?

What is the purpose of your job?

If you had all the money you needed, would you still work at your present job?

What is the purpose of retirement?

Do you do anything for others during retirement?

If you could live life over, would you change anything?

What is the purpose of your studies?

If you didn't need to work or study, what would you do with your time?

If you weren't in college, where would you be?

If someone does not go to college, does it matter?

Does it make any difference which college one attends?

When you graduate college, will you seek the job with the most satisfaction or the most money?

Why do so many college students engage in binge drinking?

Are too many college students engaged in online gambling?

Why do so many intelligent people start habits and addictions that will do them substantial, physical harm?

If you knew you couldn't fail, what would you undertake to accomplish in life?

What is the smallest amount of money you could live on for one year?

How much have your feelings about the Palestinian Authority and Hamas and Hizbollah changed **this** year?

Did you know that hundreds of rockets were still fired **this** year from Gaza into southern Israel?

How would you feel if a friend or loved one died in a terrorist attack in Israel?

Would it feel any different if a friend or loved one died in a terrorist attack in the United States?

Does Iran threaten Israel's existence?

Does Iran threaten the existence of the United States?

What would your life be like if, God forbid, there were no Israel?

Israel has a strong economy and some rich people as well as many poor people. What is our responsibility to Israel's poor?

Is there a difference between anti-Israel-ism and anti-Semitism?

How do you feel about the increase in anti-Semitism around the world?

Do you believe that "the best things in life are free?"

Why is it so important that life be happy, rather than meaningful?

What was the last new thing you learned? What do you want to learn next? What would you like to teach?

Should we care if the Jewish community continues?

Did you learn more about Judaism before or after your Bar or Bat Mitzvah?

What new mitzvah did you perform last year?

Do you ever think about performing an additional mitzvah for the coming year?

Did the opening of a new Mikvah in the Lehigh Valley mean anything to you?

What would you be willing to give up to attain spiritual enlightenment?

Did you really give to tzedakah as much as you easily could have afforded?

Do you really need to shop or make appointments on Shabbat?

Do you ever rest on Shabbat?

Is your seder just a big meal with matzah? If so, how does it differ from those who eat matzah at big meals all year?

Do you ever participate in fun, Jewish rituals?

If the survival of the Jewish people depended on you, would we survive?

How would you feel if all your grandchildren were not Jewish?

Did you connect with your grandchildren this year?

Did you connect with your grandparents this year?

If you could give your children only three pieces of advice, what would they be?

If you could give your parents only three pieces of advice, what would they be?

Whom do you admire the most and why?

How many of your friends are from a different culture or race than you?

Whom do you consider to be your enemy? If you were stuck in an elevator together with him or her, what would your conversation be like?

How do you react to friends who are in pain?

With whom did you fight this past year?

With whom do you wish to reconcile in this New Year?

Is it really in your heart to forgive, or do you merely say the words?

Those who mean the most to you -- have you ever told them how you feel? Do you ever say to them – I love you?

Why are you here tonight?

Why are you not here on so many other occasions?

Why is changing so hard?

The High Holidays provide us with an opportunity to think, to reflect, to ask questions and, ultimately, to seek answers, from yourself and from Judaism. Let us use our time wisely, and perform teshuvah thoughtfully and seriously.

AMEN