

The River of Life

Elul Contemplations for Bettering One's Life

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Nature does not follow a straight line; neither does the course of human events. Like the course of a river, human events flow this way and that way; grow wide and thin and twist and turn. No one can predict the course of an unexplored river and no one can predict the course of our human unknown future. Yet, one thing is certain, things will never flow straight, there will always be twists and curves along the way.



Great events that shift the course of history happen in a moment; they usually go by unnoticed and unrecognized. We go sleep at night in one world and wake up the following morning in an entirely different one. We did not see the shift; we did not see the change of course. Yet, life like a river flows forward and with each passing turn we are taken into regions unknown.

We have now passed through one such time and others are coming; some in months and others in years. Soon, things that we all know so well will shift and change with a sudden jerk. In the blink of an eye so much of what we hold sacred and dear will disappear. This will not happen immediately, it will happen slowly and subtly and then suddenly BANG, it will culminate.

We cannot avoid the change it is inevitable; it is destiny. Yet, we can prepare for it. We can start today and be ready to face tomorrow. Only those properly strapped in and who wear life vests can safely navigate the running rapids along the river. Running the river of life requires of us equal preparations.

Our individual destinies are decided based upon so many circumstances and events beyond both our control and imagination. There is no way for anyone to take absolute control of their lives and welfare. Such security does not exist. This being said, at the same time, we are not complete slaves to some nebulous uncontrollable destiny that dangles us like puppets on a string. Although we cannot control everything, there certainly is a great deal that we can place under our own control.

The struggle to control that which cannot be controlled takes up a good part of our lives, energy and attention. We often struggle to control that which cannot be controlled and at the same time ignore or disregard that which we can easily be controlled. There seems to be no wisdom in this.

The first of things that we can control is our focus of attention. The second thing we can control is what we choose. In most cases we have ultimate power to choose between options. Not all options may be to our liking, but we can still choose between them. When we think clearly with proper focus, we can make the right choice for the circumstances presently before us. In this way, we flow along the

course of the river of life, taking each turn as it comes and navigating it as is best for the greatest desired outcome.

Life is our learning experience. If you go through the day and have not learned anything then that is a day wasted. Mind you, some lessons are subtle and not immediately noticed; yet, they are still learned, whether or not we are aware of having learned them. It requires the focus of our attention to seek out what lesson each day has for us to learn.

Prior to sleep each night, we should lie in bed and review the day. We should look at the circumstances of the day, how we reacted to them; what did we create and how did we respond and interact with that which was not our creation but came from another source. We should review and recognize that which we did that was right and that which we did which was wrong. We should feel these things, not just think about them. This is not an academic exercise for the mind; it is a getting in touch with one's true feelings.

Upon our beds we should feel shame over our failures. Yet, rather than wallow in pity, we should feel the passion of a roaring lion. We should declare in our hearts; "although I have failed once, I will not dishonor myself, will not fail again." We go to sleep with the resolve to wake up the next day and be better than we were the day before. In this way, we learn and in this way we grow. This is how we navigate the ever changing course of the river of life.

Awakening is the key. We must awaken our slumbering hearts. We must become aware of our own inner selves and our own personal destinies. We each navigate our own personal rivers. No two people are alike, no two destinies are exactly the same. Each of us is an individual. Although we have many partners and supporters throughout many portions of our journey, nonetheless, when all is said and done, the journey is ours alone and that makes our individual paths unique.

We cannot turn to another to ask for directions along our personal river. Their directions might work well on their river, but not necessarily on ours. Granted, good advice and wisdom may enable one to help another; yet that advice and wisdom are only general principles and guidelines; they are not directives and orders to follow. The only way to follow the river is to go with its course; to move along with it and not against it. Each river has its own current and its own course. One cannot flow at the pace of another, nor can one follow a course that is not one's own.

Great passages come before us, and seldom do we recognize their significance at the moment. Only as we look back can we see the true size and significance of that which was; but by then it is already too late to choose another course or exert any influence. If we could only recognize the moment for what it is; how this would help us in making the choice of what proper course to follow. Yet, who amongst us has such insight? Who can rise above and see the tomorrow's outcome of today's decisions? The one who contemplates this course is called wise. Blessed are the wise for they shall see today what comes tomorrow and thus have the opportunity to better shape the future.

Pause before you sleep at night. Open your heart to wisdom. See with the eyes of the spirit. Learn the lesson of the soul. This is Torah. This is Teshuva. This is flowing with the course of your river of life.