

## Rabbi Lewis' message for October 2005

It seems like disasters always happen in September. I say “it seems like” because that actually isn’t true. While Hurricane Katrina occurred in September, the tsunami occurred in December. The bombing in London happened in August. What is different in September is not the frequency of catastrophes but our own awareness of these disasters. Our awareness is heightened this time of year. The months of Elul and Tishri invite us to contemplate life and death. We think more about “who shall live and who shall die, who by fire and who by water,” as the unetanneh tokef intones. This yearly self-reflection leads inevitably to the same conclusion: this is the only life you have and it is your choice how to live it. The following story offers a graphic illustration.

A foolish young student wanted to embarrass his rabbi by asking him an unsolvable riddle. With a hand hidden behind his back, he approached the rabbi during class time. He had devised a wicked scheme. “Rabbi,” he said, “I am holding a dove in my hand. Can you tell me if it is alive or dead?”

The rabbi thought carefully. If he were to reply, “The bird is dead,” then the student would simply bring out his hand to show everyone that the dove was alive. If the rabbi were to reply, “The bird is alive,” however, then the student would close his hand around the dove and crush it. The student smiled as he thought to himself, “There is no way the rabbi can solve this puzzle.”

The rabbi closed his eyes and, after a few moments, opened them and spoke. “My young friend,” he said to the student, “You have presented us with a very difficult puzzle indeed. In your hand, you are holding a life. Choose well what you will do with it. The answer to your question lies in your hand alone.” (Adapted from Steve Rosman, Sidrah Stories) Like that young student, your choices lie in your hands. As this new year begins, I pray that you make good ones.

Shana tova.

Rabbi Ellen Lewis  
October 2005