Goals and Our Souls: Thoughts on Parashat Emor

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By
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Some years ago, someone gave me a clock as a present. I installed a battery and put the clock on a shelf in my office. The clock ticks and the second hand makes full circles every 60 seconds. The problem is that the minute and hour hands do not move! It's always the same time.

I kept this clock, because it seems to be offering a parody of life. It looks like it's moving right along, but it is just going in circles. It never advances. Sometimes life can be that way: our hearts tick, our legs walk--but we seem to be staying in the same place spiritually. We find ourselves running in circles, without advancing. Life can become a routine, without focus and without goals.

Judaism seeks to keep us spiritually alert. Its many mitzvoth aim at stimulating spiritual development. Our daily prayers and blessings, and our weekly observance of Shabbat are intended to energize us, to help us stay fresh and alive and growing.

This week's Torah reading includes laws relating to the holy days--Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Succoth, Pessah and Shavuoth. The Torah refers to these days as "mikra-ei kodesh", days of hallowed assembly. If we have fallen into a daily or weekly routine, these holy days call us together and provide a new dose of holiness. They are special days, and they generate feelings of anticipation and renewal.

Judaism gives us every opportunity to avoid becoming like clocks that do not advance. The Torah prods us, reminds us, cajoles us to keep growing spiritually, to keep a lively sense of wonder and excitement in life.

People tend to go in circles if they do not know where they are going. If life is lived randomly, without thought of goals, then one never really knows if he/she has advanced. It is helpful spiritually and emotionally to have goals--and to work toward them in a focused way. Once those goals are achieved, we then need new goals to pursue. Life is an ongoing process in which we should be moving forward.

For example, we might decide to concentrate more deeply on one blessing or prayer; when we have achieved that, we can choose another blessing or prayer for our meditation. We might devote time to charity work and acts of kindness; we can measure how much time we give, and we can increase the quantity and quality of our work if we set goals for ourselves. We can choose to devote a specified amount of time to studying Torah, to reading books of Jewish religious value, to researching a topic in Judaism about which we want to know more. We can measure our progress. We know that when we achieve one goal, we can then decide on our next goal. If we follow this pattern for many years, we actually can see how far we have advanced...and how much further we need to advance.

That clock that I received doesn't tell me the correct time. But it reminds me how important time is, and how vital it is to utilize our time in a meaningful, focused way. After all, no one wants to become like a clock that runs in circles, without advancing.

Angel for Shabbat