

Writing and Sealing **(Is the Book of Life on Kindle?)**

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From "Unetaneh Tokef" (11th century)

בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יִכְתְּבוּן, וּבְיוֹם צוֹם כְּפוּר יִחְתְּמוּן. כִּמָּה יַעֲבֹרוּן, וְכִמָּה יִבְרָאוּן, מִי יַחֲיֶה, וּמִי יָמוּת, מִי בְּקִצּוֹ,
וּמִי לֹא בְּקִצּוֹ, מִי בַּמַּיִם, וּמִי בָאֵשׁ, מִי בַחֲרֹב, וּמִי בַחֲיָה, מִי בְרָעַב, וּמִי בַצָּמָא, מִי בְרַעַשׁ, וּמִי בַמַּגָּפָה, מִי
בַחֲנִיקָה, וּמִי בַסְּקִילָה, מִי יָנוּחַ, וּמִי יָנוּעַ, מִי יִשְׁקֵט, וּמִי יִטָּרֵף, מִי יִשְׁלֹו, וּמִי יִתִּיָּסֵר, מִי יַעֲנִי, וּמִי יַעֲשִׂיר, מִי
יִשְׁפֹּל, וּמִי יָרוּם. וְתִשׁוּבָה וְתַפְּלָה וְצַדִּיקָה מַעֲבִירִין אֶת רַע הַגְּזֵרָה .

On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed - how many shall pass away and how many shall be born, who shall live and who shall die, who in good time, and who by an untimely death, who by water and who by fire, who by sword and who by wild beast, who by famine and who by thirst, who by earthquake and who by plague, who by strangulation and who by lapidation, who shall have rest and who wander, who shall be at peace and who pursued, who shall be serene and who tormented, who shall become impoverished and who wealthy, who shall be debased, and who exalted. But repentance, prayer and righteousness avert the severity of the decree.

Rosh Hashanah 16b:12

R' Kaspodai said in the name of R' Yochanan: Three books are opened on Rosh Hashanah. One of absolute sinners, one of absolute tzadikim (righteous people), and one of beinonim (in-betweeners). ... Absolute tzadikim--written and sealed immediately for life. Absolute sinners--written and sealed immediately for death. Beinonim are held in the balance and stand from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur. ... If they succeed--written for life. If they do not succeed--written for death.

Rosh Hashanah 16b:6

And Rabbi Yitzhak said: A person's sentence is torn up on account of four types of actions. These are: Giving charity, crying out in prayer, a change of one's name, and a change of one's deeds for the better. But teshuvah (repentance), prayer and tzedakah (justice) avert the severity of the decree.

Exodus 32:32

Now, if You will forgive their sin [it is well and good]; but if not, erase me from Your book which You have written!”

Rashi on Exodus 32:32

FROM YOUR BOOK – of the entire book of the Torah; that people should not say about me that I was not worthy enough to pray effectively for them.

Rabbi Maurice Davis (1921-1993)

For us the Book of Life has been reduced to words of casual welcome, spoken or written on cards, *l'shanah tovah tikateivu* (May you be inscribed for a good year). The Book of Life. I wonder. Is that all it means today? When I hear those words, those words to me have meaning. I do not see a ledger in the skies wherein my fate is written, signed, and sealed. Nor do I see some greeting card, bedecked with gaily colored scenes, where on the bottom line – unvocalized – appear the words *l'shanah tovah tikateivu*. The Book of Life to me is a symbol. It says to me, “You are recorded! What you say is more than words whispered into the wind. What you are is something more than pebbles on a beach. What you do has an effect.”

Rabbi Laura Geller (1950-)

Your Book of Life doesn't begin today, on Rosh Hashanah. It began when you were born. Some of the chapters were written by other people: your parents, siblings, and teachers. Parts of your book were crafted out of experiences you had because of other people's decisions: where you lived, what schools you went to, what your homes were like. But the message of Rosh Hashanah, the anniversary of the creation of the world, is that everything can be made new again, that much of your book is written every day – by the choices you make. The book is not written and sealed; you get to edit it, decide what parts you want to emphasize and remember, and maybe even which parts you want to leave behind. Shanah tovah means both a good year, and a good change. Today you can change the rest of your life. It is never too late.

Bachya ibn Pakuda, Duties of the Heart
(1050-1120)

Days are scrolls. Write on them only what you want to be remembered.



Delia Ephron (1944-) New York Times (August 2014)

We are all being rated these days. Doctors, professors, cleaners, restaurants, the purse repair store I looked up on Yelp this morning. The app Lulu lets women rate the men they date. In Boston, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center launched a pilot program that lets patients go online to read their therapists' notes, which, in a way, is getting a rating from your shrink.

Who wants to hear what anyone thinks of you? That's why talking behind your back was invented. I avoid reading reviews of my books for fear I'll never write another sentence, and now I realize I am in danger of being rated whenever I leave the house. Do restaurants review diners? "Complained that the chopped salad wasn't chopped" – I'm sure my waiter at lunch recorded that about me just last week.

I have long been done with school. Nevertheless, it turns out, I am going to be getting report cards for the rest of my life. Remember your permanent record, as in "This is going on your permanent record."

The web is now your permanent record. And everything is going on it.