

Dear Friends,

The recording of the fate of petitioners in a book by a god or gods did not originate in Judaism. Though the center of the High Holiday liturgy is a prayer that tells us that we are written in the Book of Life (we hope) on Rosh HaShana, and our fate sealed in that book on Yom Kippur by God, the idea is found in many other ancient traditions. I gave up a literal belief in this long ago, yet through the years I have come to see it as a useful metaphor for my own power and powerlessness. My DNA determined my biological fate at the time of my conception, so my proclivity toward heart disease, for example, was programmed by Nature. Still I exercise and watch what I eat to improve the pre-programmed odds against me.

It's not always so clear how much we can do to affect the larger world, however. Will my assiduous recycling of newspapers and junk mail reduce global warming? I'd like to think that my efforts are part of a larger community's to be conscious of how we live on this earth. Will making 150 bag lunches at the synagogue six times a year keep starvation at bay? I know that it will feed 900 people. And what about voting in elections? Does my vote really matter? The act of 'casting a ballot' comes the closest to the concept of God writing us in the Book of Life, I would argue.

Election Day is the America's Yom Kippur, and the Voting Booth is our Nation's "Holy of Holies." We take all of the past with us into the polling place and thereby help determine what our future will be – in the case of the presidency for the next four years. We don't leave it for God to record. Quite the contrary, voting gives us the opportunity to play God. By voting, we take fate into our own hands. As Winston Churchill observed in the House of Commons in 1944: "At the bottom of all the tributes paid to democracy is the little man, walking into the little booth, with a little pencil, making a little cross on a little bit of paper — no amount of rhetoric or voluminous discussion can possibly palliate the overwhelming importance of that point." Failure to exercise your right to the franchise, leaves it to others to determine your life. I for one am unwilling to hand my future over to others. I will be voting on November 8.

Warmly,
Lee