

## *How to create the life you want.*

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[Steven Sotloff](#), the Jewish freelance journalist who was decapitated by ISIS, sent us all a message leading up to Rosh Hashanah. In a letter smuggled out by a former cellmate in May, he penned his thoughts to his family. A cousin read his words to the 1,000 mourners who attended the memorial service in Pinecrest, Florida.

“Live your life to the fullest... Everyone has two lives. The second one begins when you realize you only have one.”

### **Everyone has two lives. The second one begins when you realize you only have one.**

We are approaching the holiest days of the Israelis calendar. It is time to take stock, to recognize that we have only one life and need to make each day count.

### **Spiritual Check-Up**

Elul, the Hebrew month leading up to Rosh Hashanah, is a time set aside for spiritual self-examination. We [scrutinize](#) our values. We think about the way we treat others, speak to both strangers and family, and whether we have lived with a compassionate heart. We ask ourselves if we have set aside real time to forge a relationship with our Creator. The ultimate question of ‘who am I’ and ‘how is this world better because I am present’ is pondered by taking a long, hard look within.

Sometimes we come up deficient. It is painful to confront the image that stands before us in the mirror. We cannot believe how bitter or negative we have become. Scenes from the past year that were buried away now pop up and we are troubled by the tones we used or words that were said.

This past summer, I had the joy of having my daughter and her family spend a few weeks with us in our Long Island home. They live in Israel and everything was new and exciting to the children. As I was taking my 6-year-old granddaughter out to the main avenue in town, I knew that she would be meeting many people for the very first time. I explained to her the importance of saying hello with a smile.

“Bubby, I think that some people are allergic to a smile. Do you think so too?” she asked.

I had to laugh but realized that there was much truth in this child’s observation. Time passes, we become jaded. We forget how to smile and appreciate daily moments of joy. A critical eye strips us of seeing life as a blessing. We complain, we blame, we whine, we point fingers, we judge, and we bring negative energy into our homes. We rush our kids along so that we can finally have some quiet, not realizing that we are missing out on life’s sweetest moments. If we are serious about making this world better, the place to begin is within ourselves.

## **What is the secret to successful change?**

Mindfulness is the first step. Become aware of your daily interactions. Are most of your conversations putting others down, sarcastic responses, or impatient retorts? Have you become more connected to your iPhone than to the people in your life who need you most? When was the last time you shared a word of appreciation or encouragement-especially to your family?

If we are brutally honest with ourselves, we may feel shame with the way we have acted – screaming at the kids, overblown anger at our spouse, being a source of malicious gossip that hurt others and sullied our souls. Some of us made wrong decisions that caused incredible pain. As long as we keep rationalizing our bad behavior we will never confront ourselves.

Step 2 requires a sense of embarrassment that propels us to take action.

Instead of just living with self-humiliation or rationalizing our bad behavior, this is the point where we can make real change happen. We take the discomfort and use the emotion as a positive energy to embark upon a new path. Life is about asking ourselves how can I take this moment and create a better me. What must I do right now so that I won't remain nursing my wounds and bitter regrets? Let's think about our triggers. Making a plan on how to react next time we are faced with a frustrating personality or situation will help us recalibrate.

**Choose a kindness a day, one less hurtful response, one more smile when you feel depleted and want to scream.**

Transforming oneself can be a most difficult challenge. Sometimes we change because we want to grow, other times we don't really want to change but we recognize that we must. Either way, if we take our passion to create the life we want, we have the ability to rejuvenate ourselves. A spiritual makeover keeps us moving forward. Stagnation leads to depression of the soul.

## **Keep Climbing**

The best way to reach new heights is to make a plan and keep on climbing. And while we climb we will probably fall. Don't be afraid of failure. Of course there will be times that we will still yell, share some juicy gossip, or seem uncaring to our spouse. This doesn't mean that we should give up or that our attempts to be better were for naught. Tomorrow is another day and another opportunity for change. We will not completely alter ourselves overnight. God who created us knows this and is most patient with us, His children. He wants to see that we are not callous and indifferent. Every parent desires a connection with his child. When we turn towards God and attempt to better ourselves, we are expressing our desire to reconnect with our Father. We are displaying the value we place on the gift of soul that we have been given.

These are days of reconciliation between us and God. Take a few moments, right now, and make a decision that will [transform your life](#). Embrace your ability to change. Choose a kindness a day, one less hurtful response, one more smile when you feel depleted and want to scream, one more mitzvah that stretches your heart and soul. We have only one life. Start living it now.

## About the Author

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