Doing VS Being:

A chaplain’s view of the American struggle with death and dying from a Jewish perspective.

By Chaplain Kit Hall
Life and Death. Will it all make sense when we grow up?

- Look, a dead bird!
- It must've hit the window.
- Isn't it beautiful? It's so delicate.
- Sigh... Once it's too late, you appreciate what a miracle life is.
- You realize that nature is ruthless and our existence is very fragile, temporary, and precious.
- But to go on with your daily affairs, you can't really think about that.
- Which is probably why everyone takes the world for granted and why we act so thoughtlessly.
- It's very confusing.
- I suppose it will all make sense when we grow up.

Calvin and Hobbes

H. C. Anderson
What does Death mean to YOU?

In one or two words describe your feelings about death....or less abstractly.... About Your Death
“If death is devoid of meaning then life is absurd. Life’s ultimate meaning remains obscure unless it is reflected upon in the face of death.

Yet, there is a slowness, a delay, a neglect on our part to think about it.

What characterizes modern man’s attitude toward death is escapism…”

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel
Is there more?
Or
Where do we go when we die?
Perkei Avot

“The world stands on three things: Torah, the service of God, and good deeds.”

“Do not permit your heart to convince you that death is your escape; for against your will you are formed, against your will you are born, against your will you live, against your will you die, and against your will you are destined to give a judgment and accounting before the king of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.”

“It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task you started, but neither are you free to release yourself from it before it has been completed.”
Doing

Most of our life is made up of “doing”. Going from point “A” to point “B”. Striving, achieving, maintaining and on and on.

And Jews excel at “doing”, it is part of our covenant with HaShem and our cultural heritage. To “do” the Mitzvot, is to weight the scales in our favor!
Is there an eternal reward?

WHAT IF THERE'S NO AFTERLIFE? SUPPOSE THIS IS ALL WE GET.

OH, WHAT THE HECK. I'LL TAKE IT ANYWAY.

Yeah, but if I'm not going to be eternally rewarded for my behavior, I'd sure like to know now.
Do you believe in Heaven?

HOBBS, WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENS TO US WHEN WE DIE?

I THINK WE PLAY SAXOPHONE FOR AN ALL-GIRL CABARET IN NEW ORLEANS.

SO YOU BELIEVE IN HEAVEN? CALL IT WHAT YOU LIKE.
How have you striven? Has it helped?

- Reflect on your achievements and attempts to live a righteous life.

- In retrospect, do your achievements and mitzvot fill you with confidence and peace when contemplating your death or guilt and regrets?

- Share examples.
Is there another way?
The challenge of “just being”.

The chasidic teacher Rabbi Zusha of Hanipul used to say: “When I come before the heavenly court and am asked, “Zusha, why were you not Moses?’ I will answer, ’Because I did not have Moses’ leadership abilities.’ And when I am asked, Zusha why were you not Abraham?’ I will answer, “Because I was not blessed with
Abraham’s intellectual abilities.” For every such question, I will have an answer. But when I am asked, ‘Zusha, why were you not Zusha?’ For that I will have no answer.”
Taking off our masks: Be-coming “Zusha”

- What does it mean to you to “become Zusha,” to become who you really are?

- Can you learn to be at peace when you can not “do” for yourself and can only “be”?

- What would you need to complete to find peace in “being”?
The Four Things that Matter Most: A book about living

By Ira Byock

Palliative Care and Hospice physician and Jewish Author, Ira Byock states: “The specter of death reveals our relationships to be our most precious possessions.”

In this book Dr. Byock offers insights from his work with the dying. These relate directly to the ethical teachings that permeate Judaism in regards to relationships with others.
The Four Things that Matter Most

- Please Forgive Me
  T’shuvah; to return, as before the injury occurred
- I Forgive You
  Mechila; to forgo the debt; to grant a pardon
- Thank You
  Todah; creating a space for the Divine presence
- I Love You
  Ani ohev otcha; love one another; imitate G-d’s love
Ultimately

We trust Him who made us what we are and will make us what He pleases.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Into Your hand I entrust my spirit;
You redeem me, O Lord, faithful G-d.

Tehilim 31:6  JPS
“Death is the next great adventure!”

Captain James Hook