

Rav Kook Torah



by Rabbi Chanan Morrison -
www.ravkooktorah.com

The Value of Life

Summary: Since my soul has entered the world at this point in time, it must be that now there is some mission for me to accomplish.

We conclude the VIDUI confessional prayers of Yom Kippur with the following declaration:

My God, before I was formed, I was of no worth. And now that I have been formed, it is as if I was not formed.

The Talmud (B'rachot 17a) records that fourth-century scholar Rava composed this prayer, but its meaning is unclear. Before I was formed, of course I was of no worth – I did not exist yet! And after I was formed – why does it say that “it is as if I was not formed”? Do I exist or not?

My Life's Goal

This short prayer gives us an important insight into the meaning of our existence.

"Before I was formed, I was of no worth." Clearly, before I was born I was not needed in this world. "I was of no worth" – nothing required my existence, there was no mission for me to fulfill. Since I was not yet

needed in the world, I was not born in an earlier generation.

"And now that I have been formed" – since my soul has entered the world at this point in time, it must be that now there is some mission for me to accomplish. I am needed to repair and complete some aspect of the world.

And yet, "it is as if I was not formed." Were I to dedicate my life to fulfilling the purpose for which I was brought into the world, this would confirm and justify my existence. But since my actions are not in accordance with my true goal, I am not accomplishing my life's mission. And if I fail to fulfill my purpose in life, my very existence is called into question.

If I do not accomplish the mission for which I was placed in this world, then the situation has reverted back to its state before my birth, when, since I was not needed in the world, I was not yet formed. Thus, even now that I have been formed, it is regrettably "as if I was not formed."

The Message for Yom Kippur

It is highly significant that this prayer was added to the Yom Kippur confession. After we have recognized and admitted our many faults and mistakes, we could conclude that we cause more harm than good, and would be better off retiring to the privacy of our homes.

Rava's prayer teaches that we have a

mission to accomplish, and it is critical that we discover this mission and work toward fulfilling it. Otherwise, tragically, “it is as if I was not formed.”

Silver from the Land of Israel - pp. 77-78.

Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. II, p. 356