

IN A THEATRE NEAR YOU

by Rabbi Label Lam

The primary wisdom is fear of HASHEM... (Tehillim 111)

Look at three things and you will not come into the grip of sin. Know what is above from you. **1)** A seeing eye **2)** An ear that hears **3)** All of your deeds are written in a book. (Chapters of the Fathers 2:1)

In advance of the arrival of Rosh Hashana we might wish to ask ourselves what is meant by the books of "life" and "death" that the Talmud tells us are open during these days of awe.

Occasionally I have asked audiences, "What's the difference between me and Steven Spielberg?" The usual answer is, "\$250 million!" Let me qualify the question. What's the difference between us in the following way; Let us say that we just came back from an exotic vacation. We invite to our house a group of our closest friends, for an evening of relaxation. I call everyone to watch a one hour video which includes all the footage of our last trip. There we are in front of some ancient icon, standing next to a native, or riding on the back of some semi-domesticated beast. Guaranteed, that not 10 minutes into the presentation people will begin to invent different excuses to leave. I can promise that these people will be very hesitant to accept another invite to our house again.

Steven Spielberg makes a movie and millions of people all over the world are willing to pay \$15 a pop to see a 3 and ½ hours epic film that nauseates, scares, and wows them out of their minds. They can't wait for the next movie to be released and they'll pay again just to see the movie about how the movie was made.

What's the difference between his movie and mine? I have effectively alienated even my best friends. He has managed to attract a myriad of strangers. What turned people off from my presentation? The movie sadly had no beginning, no middle, and most painfully no end, just a bunch of sound and fury signifying nothing. When picking up my camera I had no prior thought about who might be seeing this film. I just shot away.

Steven Spielberg doesn't just pick up a camera and shoot. He invests time reviewing scripts and analyzing plots all the while keeping in mind the psyche of his target audience. Eventually he confronts a story he feels will touch them profoundly. Then he begins to plan out how to produce these 145 scenes that if played out in sequence will have the desired effect. Then and only then do the cameras begin to roll. He may shoot a scene hundreds of times sparing no expense to get it right. Finally after everything is done the creative process of editing begins. 95% of the collected

footage goes to the cutting room floor and the remainder is a few hours of imaginative magic for his audience's delight.

The Nefesh HaChaim writes that the meaning of the phrase, "know what is above from you" is to be understood to mean, "Know that what is above, forever, is from you!" The good news and the bad news is that whatever we do is forever. The Talmud tells us that the wise one sees what will result in the future! It doesn't mean that he can pick stocks. No! It means that he envisions and anticipates the farthest future, in front of Whom will every detail of our lives be displayed forever? The Talmud tells us that the goals of wisdom are; 1) Repentance and 2) Good deeds. To upgrade the analogy; transcendent- wisdom enables us to do two things; 1) Film further and 2) Edit. Therefore, at each moment of life we have our whole future and past before us.

Haphazard living without some measure of supernal awareness produces dead time that is disconnected from a lasting purpose. Those moments, though, whether prayerful or pedestrian which were lived or relived with a healthy reverence for the "eye that sees", will likely live forever and yield unimaginable thrills in a theatre near you. Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.