

"STAY ALERT...STAY AWAKE...STAY ALIVE!"

by Jon Erlbaum

- This Week's **RRR** (Relevant Religious Reference): **"Choose Life!"** - Deuteronomy, 30:19
- This Week's **SSC** (Suitable Secular Citation): **"Stay Alert...Stay Awake...Stay Alive"** - Series of 3 signs on the **ATLANTIC CITY EXPRESSWAY**

MEASURING IN "REAL TIME"

*A man visiting a Jewish cemetery in a foreign town stumbles upon something quite unexpected. On each tombstone is etched not the date of the person's passing, but rather the AGE of the person when he or she left this world: in years, months and days! Confused but intrigued, our traveler next notices that the ages listed of the departed are all very young. One stone reads "7 years, 4 months, and 6 days". Another reads "16 years, 6 months, and 23 days". He soon comes across a member of the Burial Society, and upon asking him why everyone buried there had passed on to the next world so young, he receives a response that shakes him to his core: "on our community's tombstones, we don't record the amount of TOTAL TIME that people spend existing on this earth," says the helpful gentleman. **"We record the REAL TIME they spent on this earth: the sum total of how much time they devoted to acts of kindness, refinement of character, the performance of Mitzvahs and the study of our precious Torah's wisdom[1]."***

"AH, HA, HA, HA, STAYIN' ALIVE, STAYIN' ALIVE"

In light of the story above, we might suggest that whoever put up the 3-part series of signs on the Atlantic City Expressway - i.e. "STAY ALERT... STAY AWAKE... STAY ALIVE" - was on to something big (in fact, at risk of sparking a conspiracy theory, I can't help but wonder whether the NJ State Department of Transportation at that time was really run by the Rabbinate[3])! But in addition to the importance of heeding these signs during our summer journeys back from the Shore, we would do well to perceive them on our journeys through each day.

Fortunately, Rosh Hashana helps us to capture the themes of these signs and to anchor them as daily mental billboards - jolting us back to reality when we become lulled into spiritual slumber by our "life in the fast lane^{4]}". **On Rosh Hashana, we can hear the themes of these messages resonate as the 3 BLASTS of the Shofar are filling the air: "STAY ALERT - STAY AWAKE - STAY ALIVE".** These sounds reveal to us what it means to be truly alive. As the Shofar calls out to us, it beckons us to meditate on its motif: that being "truly ALIVE" requires being spiritually awake! And that being "truly AWAKE" requires being spiritually alert: consciously and consistently aware of our soul's mission in this world! How does the Shofar achieve this?

MERELY EXISTING VERSUS TRULY LIVING

When we blow the Shofar, we are filling an otherwise hollow shell of PHYSICAL EXISTENCE with an animated breath of SPIRITUAL LIFE FORCE. This act drives home a profound message: in a sense, **when we are not "awake" (i.e. not aware of our Soul's mission in this world), our lives also resemble the empty lifelessness of an unblown Shofar - of bodily matter devoid of spiritual circulation and expression.** The Shofar's blast inspires us to go beyond mere survival by tapping into the transcendent vitality of the human spirit. Its sounds reveal to us that we have a choice between existence and LIFE, and they cry out for us to "choose LIFE". May we all be blessed to go far with the Shofar this Rosh Hashana, allowing its blasts to break down our barriers and penetrate our resistances! And may its cries awaken us to live the kind of LIFE that our Creator would want to say "**L'Chaim**" to!

Have a Wonderful Shabbos! Love, Jon & The Chevra

- 1) Adapted from a story that I first saw written by Raymond Beyda on [Torah.org](https://torah.org)
- 2) From the chorus of the song "Stayin' Alive" by the Bee Gees
- 3) Although I believe the 3 signs have at this point been taken down, so I'm not sure who's running the show nowadays...
- 4) A popular expression, but also the title & refrain of a song by The Eagles

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