

We live our lives each day knowing, at some level, that our time on earth is finite, that each of us draws closer to the end of our lives even as we love, learn, and work. As we age, understanding that we have fewer days ahead of us than behind us, our thoughts turn naturally to the meaning of our lives, to the legacy that we will leave behind. That legacy can take many forms: children, possessions, values and beliefs, patterns of behavior, acts of kindness and devotion. In all of these ways, and many more, we affect the people and the world around us, but it is only our awareness of life's brevity that provides us a context for making the daily and workaday into opportunities for lasting meaning.

As we reach the end of the annual reading of the Torah, Moses approaches death. God tells him that he will not reach the land of Canaan, and will not live to see his life's work of delivering the people to the Promised Land completed. Moreover, Moses fears that the long struggle to get the people even this far is not yet won. Their devotion to God and their shared future is fragile; Moses suspects that the people will not continue as a community after his death. In order to safeguard all that he has worked so hard to achieve, Moses does two things: He puts down his values in writing, and he trains a successor. In doing these things, Moses ensures that there is a clear and public record of what the community stands for, and the proper leadership to follow through on the promises made between God and the people. Without those steps, there is no guarantee that all Moses did will not be buried with him.

Over the next several weeks, we will all remind ourselves that our lives have an end, and that one way we make our lives meaningful is by acknowledging that fact and viewing our actions in light of that end. If we knew this would be our last year, how would we live it? What

would we do to ensure our own legacies? How would we behave in our day-to-day relations with other people? What instructions, written or otherwise, would we leave behind? Who have we trained to take over? The High Holidays remind us that every day is an opportunity to turn back to our better selves, to create a future memory of ourselves in which we were a source of light, of love and of blessing.