



Office of The CHIEF RABBI

The Chief Rabbi's Rosh Hashanah Message 5787

In 2025, Netflix released a documentary entitled "Don't Die: The Man Who Wants to Live Forever." It followed Bryan Johnson, a billionaire entrepreneur who has devoted his life to slowing, and even reversing, the ageing process. His regimen involved aggressive medical treatments, extreme lifestyle disciplines and a vast array of scientific experiments. Yet despite these extraordinary efforts, Johnson was diagnosed this year with autoimmune gastritis, an incurable condition affecting the stomach lining. His story serves as a powerful reminder that even in an age of unprecedented scientific achievement, there remain limits to what human beings can control.

It is human nature to prize certainty. We crave clear answers and cast-iron guarantees wherever possible. Recognising this, the Rambam observed that "there is no joy as great as the resolution of doubt." Whether waiting for a diagnosis, news from a loved one or clarity about the future, most of us would rather live with an answer than a question. By contrast, prolonged uncertainty can leave us feeling vulnerable and anxious.

Our community is no stranger to vulnerability. Over the past year, we have faced terror in our shuls and on our streets, alongside a tidal wave of anti-Jewish hatred across social media, university campuses and beyond. The Hebrew word for doubt, "safek", comes from a root meaning "enough". Doubt should therefore spur us to seek sufficient understanding and perspective to confront the uncertainty before us.

Fascinatingly, the word "doubt" does not appear in the Torah because, even in the most challenging circumstances, God's presence is never absent. This is one of the central messages of Rosh Hashanah, reflected in King Avimelech's observation about Abraham in our New Year Torah reading: "God is with you in everything that you do."

Abraham's life was marked by hardship, upheaval and trial. Yet he achieved greatness because he knew he was in God's hands. A meaningful Jewish life is not necessarily one free from pain or uncertainty, but one in which we find the strength to move forward despite them, and sometimes because of them.

Every morning in our prayers, we say: "Many are the intentions in the human heart, but the will of God will prevail (Takum)." Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe of the Be'er Yaakov Yeshiva offered a striking interpretation of these words. When we are paralysed by uncertainty and do not know which path lies ahead, God's guidance is contained in the final word of the verse: "Takum". Stand up!

Stand tall as Jews. Be proud of who you are, even when it is difficult. Hold fast to your values, even when they are challenged. Do so knowing that the same God who sustained our ancestors through generations of uncertainty continues to sustain us today.

Not every question will be answered. Not every problem will be solved. But as we enter this Rosh Hashanah, we can face an uncertain future with confidence, faith and pride, knowing that whatever lies ahead, our community will continue to stand strong together.

Valerie joins me in wishing you all a sweet, fulfilling, safe and peaceful New Year.

Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE



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