Before the Unetaneh Tokef

Some time ago, I read of a patent of a watch that came out more than a decade ago. It is called a "Life Expectancy Timepiece." The watch contains a tiny computer into which you feed your age, medical history, life-style, eating habits and exercise regimens. The watch then uses algorithms data to compute your life expectancy and begins counting down to zero.

Rabbi Rami Shapiro commented on this idea by saying, “Imagine walking down the street and someone asks you the time. You glance at your watch and say: "Oh, about 37 years, 110 days, 21 hours, 4 minutes and 42 seconds until I die." Isn't that more interesting than saying "3:45?"

He says, “Some may be thinking: "God, how depressing!" On the contrary, being reminded that my life is finite is incredibly liberating: "I’ve only got 37 years, 110 days, 21 hours, 4 minutes and 42 seconds left, I don’t have time to spend it talking to you!"

On Rosh Hashanah it is written, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed. How many will die and how many will be born? Who at ripe old age and who before their time. Who by fire and who by water? Who by sword and who by beast?

It hurts so much to live in the face of death that even on Yom Kippur, even when we rehearse our own death by fasting and wearing shrouds and non-leather shoes, we want *unetaneh tokef* to be a metaphor. We want the inevitable question of who was here last year that isn’t here now and who here this year that won’t be next year to be a poem, or a parable. It’s not. The *unetaneh tokef* is not a poem or metaphor, it is a wake up call, it’s a shofar blast of warning. No one knows when the gates will close forever so while we are inside them we had better love passionately, fight passionately, learn passionately, live passionately. We say, *Unetaneh tokef kedushat hayom, ki hu norah vayom*, Let us declare the holiness of this day for it is awesome and full of dread. Awe-full. In the wake of Katrina, the Tsunami, of 9/11, of the images from Iraq I’m filled with awe every day now. Every sunrise, every sunset, I say ‘*shehecheyanu’;* who has kept us alive, sustained us, and helped us reach this day. This day, *Unetaneh tokef kedushat hayom* let us declare the holiness of this day, because it is the only day we have for sure. Love with urgency now. Fight with urgency now. Live with urgency now. Don’t waste a single second.