

"And Hashem said to Moshe, behold your days approach that you must die." (31:14)

The *Midrash* mentions a poignant story which can serve as a lesson for us, especially during the current Days of Awe. The great sage, *Rabbi Shimon Ben Chalafta*, went to a *bris milah*, at which the child's father made an impressive feast. In fact, after serving a very old wine to the guests, the father proudly proclaimed that he would age a portion of this wine for the future joyful occasions of his son. Upon leaving this feast, the sage encountered the Angel of Death, who seemed to be in a "happy mood." he questioned the angel as to the source of his merriment. The Angel responded that he was laughing at the foolishness of human beings. He explained that this man, who had promised to put away wine for the future, would actually be dead in less than thirty days. He continued to deride the folly of man who does not realize that he is mere putty in the hands of the Almighty. The sage then asked the Angel to "show" him his own time of death. The Angel responded, "I have no power over you or other righteous people like you. Hashem often desires your good deeds and He, therefore, adds days to your originally predetermined life-span," as it says in *Mishlei 10:27* "*the fear of Hashem adds days.*"

During the Days of Awe, our future is precarious. Our merit is meticulously scrutinized every day. This *Midrash* communicates a powerful message to us, especially at this vulnerable time. The *Mezritcher Magid* states that man is placed on this world to fulfill a purpose. When that mission has been completed, we should constantly undertake new spiritual endeavors, so that they may serve as a source of merit for our continued life. With this thought in mind, we might view opportunities for new spiritual responsibilities as a special gift from Hashem for prolonging life.