

Death And Free Choice

“See I have set before thee this day life and good,
death and evil...life and death, the blessing and the curse
Therefore choose life, that thou mayest live
thou and thy seed.”

We are given freedom to choose
we are minds and hearts and intuitions
not automata, robots, pawns of another will
Without freedom
prescription and proscription turn to mindless laws
Without freedom, praise or blame are but foolish conceits
In large areas of life
We exercise free choice and responsibility for acts and intentions
But not in all matters are we free.

Necessities, compulsions, accidents
amoral laws of nature, limit our cherished claims to freedom
The Rabbis knew it
“By dint of force are we born
By dint of force we die.”
When we are born, with what we are born, to whom we are born
When we die, of what we die, what we carry mindlessly in our seed
our bones, our blood is not ours to choose
nor ours to bear responsibility
When we die, of what we die is not in our hands.

But how we live and how we die
how we respond to illness and to dying
over this we have measures of choice.

Whether we sink into despair allow the darkness of death to
eclipse the brightness of life
Whether we allow the last days of suffering
to wipe out the memory of joys and laughter
allow death to kill the spirit of hope
the past to overwhelm the future
Or rise to courage, accept facts without surrender
open ourselves to the possibilities of the future
Over these life and death attitudes we may exercise mastery
wrestle the shadows.

Bowed in sorrow
we rise to recite the Kaddish
On our feet we stand to confront the grave
promise to make our choices, form our future
shape our lives, bless our children
within the limits of inexorable boundaries.

Life and death, the blessing and the curse are given us
Choose wisely and with heart.

