

If I Could Reach Across the Ages....  
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If I could reach across the ages, I would want to embrace you and to speak with you about my life and yours. Let this Ethical Will be my embrace.

I've been blessed to have had guiding lights in my life. My father, Leonard Laser, had many wisdoms. He passed them on by word and by deed. My friends, loved ones, and other mentors taught me as well. I want to return the favor by presenting to you some of my best-loved thoughts. Perhaps you will do the same for those who will come after you.

#### LISTEN FOR THE CALL

There have been critical junctures in my life. Sometimes I had the odd thought that God wanted me to take one path rather than another. Know that when I use the word "God," I'm speaking metaphorically. Yet, the metaphor contains a mystery.

#### KEEP SENSITIVE YOUR HEART

I see no other way to learn and grow and become a decent human being than to allow yourself to feel with others. The Book of Deuteronomy and the Prophet Jeremiah implore us to remove the thickening from around our hearts. John Dos Passos, during the trauma of World War II, wrote, "Our only hope will lie in the frail web of understanding of one person for the pain of another."

#### ACQUIRE A *TZEDAKAH* HABIT

My great grandmother, Etta Leah Laser, passed on her devotion to the poor through simple, selfless deeds. Frequently she was seen going about in well-worn garments as she distributed her new clothes to needy women in her neighborhood. On her death it was discovered that her *tachrichim* (burial garments) were missing. She had parted even with the shrouds.

As a young person I became convinced that my father did business primarily to support his "zedakah habit." These treasures have come to me. I bequeath them to you.

#### FIND WAYS TO KEEP HOPE ALIVE

The redemptive hope for a world of peace, justice, and compassion is a unique contribution of Judaism to the world. To work toward such transformation, we need to believe that change is possible. I've kept a "hope list" detailing astounding changes I've seen in my lifetime, among them the rise of the women's movement in the 1960's and the

fall of the South African apartheid system in the 1980's. This list helps me when odds seem insurmountable.

The words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. fortify me as well: "The long arc of history bends toward justice."

#### LET JEWISH TEXTS STRENGTHEN YOU

I rely often on this Talmudic text:

If one can protest and prevent the commission of a sin by one's household, one's fellow citizens or the whole world and does not, one is accountable for those sins. (Shabbat 54b)

This awesome saddling with responsibility to prevent and protest evil, lest one be complicit in the evil, has helped me to find the strength and courage to say and do things I have feared or resisted doing. However, too often I have been complicit.

#### CULTIVATE ATTACHMENT TO THE CREATED WORLD

I worry about the abuse of the Earth. It is for me a primary source of awe. It is for all of us a lifeline. Reverence for creation begins in childhood. Please help the children in your life to experience the rapture of our world. Walk with them and name the flowers and plants and trees. The cultivation of an early "sense of wonder" (Rachel Carson's words) will enable them to thrill to the Earth and, as they grow, to want to protect it.

#### ENVISION A SPIRITUAL ATMOSPHERE

Imagine a "spiritual atmosphere" surrounding the world: All of our actions influence the mix, adding to either the nutrients or toxins. Decide whether the deeds or words you're contemplating will enrich or deplete the atmosphere. This thought has influenced my behavior with loved ones, in commerce, and in places where it might seem irrelevant.

#### END THOUGHTS

It's hard to figure out how to live our one and only life, hard to get it all right at the same time. I never did and I never will. Still, I've thought deeply about things, with as much honesty as I could manage. I've engaged with the world in ways that seemed to matter, in places that have called me. In the process, there have been times of fear, uncertainty, and desperation. Still, I'm left with the sense that I've been blessed to learn, to grow, and to know the thrill of being alive.

For you, too, I wish the blessings of learning, loving, contributing, and experiencing the wonder of it all.