

Building Houses

An elderly and talented carpenter was ready to retire. He told his long-time employer of his plans to leave the house-building business and live a more leisurely life with his wife, enjoying his multi-generation family. He would miss the paycheck but he needed to retire.

His boss, the contractor, was sorry to see his good worker and friend go and asked if he could build just one more house as a personal favor. The carpenter said yes, but in time it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. His workmanship became shoddy and he was using inferior materials. He just wanted to be done. And it was an unfortunate way to end his career. When the carpenter finished his work, and the builder came to inspect the house, the contractor hand the front-door key to the carpenter. "This is your house," he said, "my gift to you."

What a shock it was...and what a shame! If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done is all so differently. Now he had to live in the home he had built none-too-well.

So it is with us. We build our lives in distracted ways, reacting rather than acting, willing to settle for less-than-our-best. At important moments, we do not give the job our best effort. Then, with a shock, we look at the situation we have created and find that we are now living in the house we have built. If we had only realized, we would have done it differently.ⁱ

Each act, every thought has a consequence...it is another element of the life we build. All of our words, thoughts, and deeds together create our home, our life. And there is judgment in this. As the prayer states, every deed is recorded and counted.

Think of yourself as the carpenter. Now, think about your house, your life. Each day, you hammer a nail, place a board, or erect a wall. Build wisely. It is the only life you will ever build. Even if you live it for only one day more, that day deserves to be lived graciously and with dignity. The plaque on the wall of our home says, "Life is a do-it-yourself project."ⁱⁱ

ⁱ Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, VT; 2005; p. 164

ⁱⁱ Ibid.