

The New York Times

Published: November 9, 2012

Nothing focuses the mind, or stirs reflection on remorse, like mortality.

THOMAS ARNOLD KEMP was executed this past April through lethal injection. He stole \$200 from a college student in Tucson in 1992 and then murdered him. It took seven minutes for Mr. Kemp to die. His last words: "I regret nothing."

Really?

I have been thinking about Mr. Kemp and death and regret, perhaps obsessively. Regret incites us to review and reflect on our actions; when we miss the mark, regret generates disappointment and grief. Regret would not have kept Mr. Kemp alive. But it might have kept him decent.

Regret is an essential part of repentance in Jewish law, and, as a rabbi and Jewish educator, I find myself thinking about regret each year before Yom Kippur. As part of my research into the subject this year, I handed out index cards to my students from age 18 to over 80, and asked them to list a small regret and a large regret.

Here is a random sampling.

Read the full article at [The New York Times](#)