

Time is Everything
Yom Kippur 5773
Rabbi Hal Rudin-Luria

It happened once that a busy merchant took a few minutes out of his hectic day to meet with his rabbi at shul. The merchant hurriedly paced the rabbi's study asking, "Rabbi, I have carved out this time so you can share with me the secret of how to live better? I want more out of this life." While the businessman spoke, a clock in the rabbi's office struck the hour. Then, the rabbi responded, "Did you hear that? Your answer is in the striking of the clock. Another hour of your life has passed, and you need to ask yourself, 'How have I improved my life this moment?'" The rabbi teaches the merchant that every moment in life is an opportunity. We should be conscious how we use our time and live each moment with intention because time is everything.

At the same time as the businessman was meeting the rabbi, across the town there was a time-management seminar where the instructor held up a glass jar filled to the top with large rocks. He asked the audience if they thought the jar was full and all responded yes. He then proceeded to take smaller pebbles and poured them in the jar to fill the spaces in between the rocks.

He held the jar aloft and again asked if they thought the jar was full. They all said yes. The instructor then took sand and filled the jar again. He asked what lesson they took away from the demonstration. One person stood up and shared, "There are gaps in our lives and if one works at it, you can always fit in more." The instructor replied, "For me, the point is that the jar is our life and we have to start with the largest most important pieces or else they never would have fit in the first place. Life is not measured by how much we can do and multi-task. The priorities that we choose to focus our time on are the large rocks that fill our jar of life." What are the big rocks that make the foundation of your life? Perhaps your rocks are family, work, community, friends and synagogue? Now imagine charting how much time you actually spend on each in a week. Are you using your time to match those things that you value most? Are you living with purpose?

Yom Kippur is a time to reflect on what really matters in life, to look inside our own jar of life and find the teachings that will help us reach our potential. Looking at the lives of over two hundred people from small town barbers, successful CEOs, artists, physicians, Holocaust survivors and Native American elders, John Izzo's *The Five Secrets You Must Discover Before You Die* presents principles that can bring our lives more meaning and satisfaction. His secrets focus on two core beliefs: living in the moment and living a life in which you give more than you take.

In our over-programmed, 1,500 channel on-demand cyber-connected world, we are confronted by time everywhere, from clocks and watches, to calendars and phones. We are obsessed with time but is it allowing us to reach our potential? More often than not, we seem to be running with our smartphones and tablets in hand, but getting very little done. They are often a distraction, taking our time away from the things that are most essential. The classic Medieval poet Yehudah HaLevi warned us of our obsession with time nearly a thousand years ago and reminded us not to be its slave: "*Ov'dei Z'man, ov'dei avadim hem, eved Hashem hu l'vad chofshi*. The servants of time are slaves of slaves, while the servant of G-d alone is free!" By living in the moment, we can make our time matter.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel teaches that Judaism is a religion of time that helps us learn how to appreciate moments. No two minutes are the same. For Heschel, living with intention is the answer. In our tradition, every Jewish moment has a ritual or prayer that helps to give it meaning. On Friday night, it is the blessing over the candles and our children, every morning it is the recitation of Modeh Ani, thank you G-d for returning my soul from slumber, every night it is reciting the bedtime Shema, kissing the mezuzah when we enter our home or the ritual to empty one's pocket Friday afternoon and give money to the family tzedaka box. How are you marking Jewish time?

The word for direction or intention in Hebrew is kavanah. Back in the Mishnah, the rabbis saw the need for kavanat halev, directing one's heart and focus. Living in the moment is required for prayer and other deeds. We turn toward the Holy Ark in our

presence or face Jerusalem as a directional guide. Proper intention is necessary to fulfill the twice daily recitation of the Shema and that is why we cover our eyes, blocking out any distraction that could steal away our attention. At the Shema moment, we must be present and focused and if kavanah is missing, then it is considered an empty action, devoid of meaning, and a do-over is needed. Yom Kippur is our do-over, another chance.

There is a Chinese proverb that teaches, “The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago, but the second best time is today.” Although it is impossible to travel back in time, by living in the moment with kavanah full intention, we can make every moment count and almost hold time in our hands. Just as with prayer and mitzvot, we must also live in the moment when we are spending time with family, at synagogue or at home. Moments of focus yield time well spent.

On Yom Kippur, the culmination of Aseret Yamei HaTeshvuah, the 10 days of Repentance, we ask what more is there to life? Beating our chests as we recount the alphabet of sins, we admit that we are not perfect and need to reset our clocks and hearts for the new year. Heschel teaches that just as a mitzvah-conscious person lives in the present moment and is mindful of the constant opportunity to do good; we should be a sin-conscious people that reflect on our past, remember our failures and realize that the time is now to improve our ways. The Machzor’s repeated Hebrew word for sin is Chet. Chet is a term used in archery meaning missing the mark. Did you hit the bull’s eye this year or did your sins lead you astray and miss the mark? Integrating kavanah, we can aim for the target and live a more meaningful life.

Beginning with the first sundial, we have been marking time and counting our days. As we are instructed today to look back and recall our actions, words and thoughts of the past year, what have we really accomplished? What did we do with our time? In Mitch Albom’s *The Timekeeper*, we follow Father Time as he hears wishes from those seeking more time in our world, others asking how much time they have left in this world, and even those requesting to turn the hands of time back to yesterday for a second chance. Father Time teaches that one can never be too early or too late. Time is precious and our

task is to make the most of it. Similarly, the Biblical Psalm reads, “*Limnot Yameinu*, Teach us to number our days so that we may attain a heart of wisdom.” A wise person will identify life’s priorities and devote time to them.

The Business Bible, Harvard Business Review, agrees that living in the present moment is a key to success and even makes the rush of time seem to slow down. They offer advice regarding our second key to life, giving more than what we take. In an article entitled, “Out of Time? Give Some Away,” Cassie Mogliner suggests: “Spending time helping others leaves you feeling as if you have more time, not less. Research shows that giving to others can make you feel more “time affluent” and less time-constrained than if you spend it on yourself. People who give time feel more capable, confident and feel like they have accomplished something of meaning.” Reflecting on his life, Ken, a small town barber, says, “What I have discovered is the greatest happiness you find in life is always from what you give not what you get. These people who come into my barber shop live hard lives. For half an hour, I get to serve them and do something for them. The greatest pleasure in life is seeing that you make something better.” Judaism demands that we leave this world a better place.

Victor Frankl, Holocaust survivor and author of *Man’s Search for Ultimate Meaning*, discusses how it is possible that anyone could have endured and survived the terrors of life in the Shoah and the camps: “You could not convince someone to stay alive by telling him that he was going to get something from the world, however if you could help a person see that the world expected something of him, that there was good that he could do in his lifetime, he would almost always choose life.” We must give more than we take. Author or barber, lawyer or teacher, mother or brother, rabbi or taxi driver, our lives matter and we have the potential and the responsibility to give back. *Tikkun Olam*, improving and perfecting the world, should be a Jewish priority in our daily and weekly schedule. Being a person of service fills our life with meaning and has a lasting impact on our community and world.

The rabbis tell this story to remind us of the importance of making the best use of our time and giving more than we take. There once was a wealthy king who ordered his subjects to build him a new palace. When the palace was finished, he wanted the finest artist in the land to paint beautiful pictures on its walls. He found the two best artists in the kingdom and asked each to paint one wall of a room in the palace. To each artist he instructed, “You have 3 months in which to paint a beautiful picture on the wall. At the end of that time, I will choose the best and the artist that painted it will be given the honor of painting the rest of this palace and receive a large bag of gold and jewels.”

Now one artist was talented and hard-working and set out to work at once. He pulled out his brushes, paints and palette, and was humming as he worked. He hardly slept, ate little and did not drink the wine that the king sent. The other artist was lazy. Each day, he remained in his bed until noon and then ordered palatial room service with a large pitcher of wine and food. As he ate and drank, he laughed out loud, “There is nothing better than the king’s wine. The other artist is so foolish! Look how hard he works!” Not once did he paint even a stroke on the palace wall. The days went by, the hard-working artist painting day and night and the lazy one doing nothing.

The night before the king was to look at their work, the lazy artist awoke trembling, “I have done no work and will be punished,” he stammered. “What should I do?” He couldn’t eat or drink nor think of a plan. Then, he got an idea. He brought a large bucket of black shiny oil and brushed it on every part of the wall until it was shiny like a mirror. Then he went to bed.

The next morning, the king came to inspect the finished work. First, he revealed the painting of the hard-working artist. How magnificent it was! The birds looked so real, you could hear them chirping. The fruits looked so ripe, you wanted to reach out and pluck them. The flowers looked so delicate, you could almost smell their fragrance. The king was very pleased and called upon his court and they all gasped in delight, “We have never seen anything so beautiful.”

Then the king pulled the curtain on the work of the lazy artist. It was exactly the same as the other, line for line, stroke for stroke. Yes, there were the chirping birds, the same ripe fruit and fragrant flowers. The members of the court were even more astonished, “How could this be?” they gasped. But the king, who was not easily fooled, saw at once the difference between the work of the lazy man and the hard-working artist.

He took out just one large sack overflowing with gold and jewels and placed it near the painting of the hard-working artist. At once all present saw the same bag appear before the lazy man’s painting and they realized that it was only a reflection. The king declared, “Each of you shall receive the payment you deserve.”

Like the artists in the story, we have been given a wall in the beautiful palace of our world. How will we spend our days filling our wall? Will we let time and reward pass us by like the lazy man? Or like the hard-working artist, will we live each moment with purpose and intention, giving the best that we can?

Thankfully, our lives have been influenced greatly by the brushstrokes of those who have come before us. In a moment, we will recite the Yizkor memorial prayers recalling with love those whose deeds, teachings and values still paint our paths today. Though their lives are past, they remain present in these moments that matter most. They lived with purpose and worked to leave our families, community and world better.

This year, remember that time is everything. May we be conscious of how we spend our days to make every moment count. May we live in the moment with intention and give much more than we take. May we be inspired by the lives of those who have come before us. And may we all be sealed in the book of life for a year of happiness, satisfaction, health, direction and sacred giving. G’mar Chatima Tova