

## On The Passage Of Time

In July of 1991, a man named David Kendrick, of Berkshire New York received a patent for a new kind of watch. Now this was no ordinary watch. It was called a "life expectancy timepiece," and used actuarial data to compute your life expectancy. Instead of telling you what time it was, it told you, how much time, approximately, you had left in life! ( 1991-a different kind of smart watch entirely. I don't want to think about how much more accurate this time piece might be today). Morbid- perhaps. But I think Kendrick was onto something.

I came across a piece from Vital Speeches magazine that had a useful analogy for the moment in which we find ourselves- gathered on Yom Kippur just prior to yizkor.

*Imagine if we had a bank that credited our account each morning with \$86,400 and carried over no balance from day to day, and allowed you to keep no cash in your account, and every evening canceled whatever part of the amount you had failed to use during the day, what would you do?*

*Draw out every cent, of course. Well, we do have such a bank account, and its name is "Time."*

*Every morning it credits us with 86,400 seconds. Every night it rules off, as lost, whatever of this we have failed to invest to good purpose. It carries over no balances. It allows no overdrafts.*

*(We should) invest it wisely!*

**Time** is a tricky thing. I don't know about you- perhaps it is related to the trauma we have all been through over these past few years, or perhaps it is just that (as some of you love to point out, the young kid rabbi is starting to have hair that is thinning and graying) but as the years go on, I am starting to feel like time is moving faster, not slower.

How is it, I thought to myself last month, that I am now in the passenger seat while our oldest child is practicing driving? I am not actually as *nervous* as I thought I would be- just kind of astounded that I am here already with college right around the corner and only a few years until three of our four kids are at that stage of their lives. *I was just in college myself - wasn't I? Weren't you?*

Recently, I have found myself looking more closely at some of the pictures of my family on the walls of our home- of my siblings and cousins gathered around my Bubbie Fagie at the lake by my house (I was 8 or 9), of my father and me on a trip to the Grand Canyon (I was maybe 11), of Jane-Rachel and me when we got engaged (we really were very young), of my mom, my aunt, my mother-in law who are no longer with us—Weren't they just here?

*Where did everyone go?* I wonder silently to myself, with more frequency as of late.

I know, of course where they went. I know, of course that they now live in our hearts and souls instead of on this earth. *I know-intellectually. But still, I am astonished.*

I remember very clearly a few years ago when it was the thirtieth anniversary of my mother's passing. My daughters were getting a haircut and my sister and I were on the phone while I was waiting outside for them to finish. Not exactly the space where you want to feel overcome with grief and loss decades later- but as we were having both our daily check-in and a few minutes to reflect on the milestone of that day, we both wondered aloud to ourselves how it was possible that our mom missed everything. How it was possible that time had gone by so quickly, that we who were just the children are now adults, with our own teenaged and young adult children. It just didn't seem real.

*Where did the time go?*

But perhaps that is not the right question. Time passes- we all know that. The question is not where does time go, but rather *how are we using the time that we have.*

לְמַנּוֹת יָמֵינוּ כִּן הוֹדַע וְנִבְא לִבְּב חֻכָּה: - *So teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of*

*wisdom* (90:12) says the Book of Psalms. This is one of the great secrets of living a

meaningful, purposeful and sacred life. This is one of the great secrets of living a life

that makes a difference. The way to a heart of wisdom, the way to living a life that is filled with gratitude instead of bitterness, is connected to our ability *to number* our days, *to count* our days, to be intentional about the ways in which we are spending our time. Perhaps, when we realize that time is our most precious commodity, *we will spend less time wasting it.*

So many of us do things to try and “capture” time, to try and hold onto certain moments. But when we do this, I am not sure that we are actually present in the actual moment that we are trying to hold onto. We all know people who take thousands of pictures and videos on their phones (if you are like my kids, you take so many that you need to get extra storage to somehow “keep” all of these pictures). I sometimes marvel at the sheer volume of pictures and videos that we all take, wondering whether we will be able to access them in twenty years (how many old home video tapes *do you have* lying around, unable to be watched?!). But the truth is that perhaps it would be better to be less obsessive about our picture and video taking and more obsessive about trying to ensure that we are being truly present in the moment. Perhaps we would be wiser to pay close attention to those who we are with, to our friends, our family, our loved ones, in any given moment. Because it is those moments of presence that stay with us the longest, that leave an indelible mark on our hearts.

As you know we're a big Jewish camp family. When researching and writing about the impact Jewish overnight camp has on its campers, the most commonly cited powerful moment in camp is the experience of camp shabbat. You can ask adults who were at camp many years ago, and they can reliably describe in great detail and with a full heart the special atmosphere that is created on Friday nights, throughout Shabbat, and into the conclusion of Shabbat with Havdalah. Looking back, camp alumni can see those moments so clearly. They can feel the power of that weekly Shabbat ritual, of the songs and ritual that began and ended each Shabbat- even many years later. There were no pictures, no "visual aids" to help them- but their attentiveness, awareness, awakens, throughout their Shabbatot spent at camp -was a gift that stayed with them for many years to come.

Indeed Shabbat is precisely the tool that we were given each week to help us become more attuned to the preciousness of time, to the sacredness of every breath with which we are blessed. In a wonderful new book (which I have just begun) by Dr. Nehemia Polen called "Stop, Look, Listen" about the spiritual practice of Shabbat, the author explains that the creation story in Genesis culminates with God establishing the fundamental, universal rhythm, the beat of days:

One-two-there- four-five-six-STOP  
One-two-there- four-five-six-STOP  
One-two-there- four-five-six-STOP

By “blessing” and “hallowing” the day, God in effect invites creation to join in this foundational rhythm, to pick up the beat and carry it forward. God punctuates time and invites us to do so as well. We would do well to think of the musical “rest” in a score. String players in an orchestra lift their bows and pause to provide the sonic syntax that elicits meaning from the sequence of notes. The biblical day of rest/cessation does exactly the same.

Many biblical passages highlight the fleeting nature of time... How are we to respond to this existential ache at the core of human existence?

(Again to Psalm 90, verse 12)

Tracking the Hebrew of that verse more accurately, we ask God to give us *daat*-awareness, alertness, discernment, and perception- to be able to count our days and thereby to become worthy of receiving “the heart of wisdom.” Nothing can stop the passage of time, but when we take refuge with God, in God, then time takes shape; we are able to count our days and make our days count...

Psalm 90:5 asserts that the rushing stream of life can be overwhelming, *putting us to sleep in the middle of the rapids. The way to wake up and avoid drowning* is to enter God’s time with a divine dance of “One-two-there- four-five-six-STOP.”

Without Shabbos, there would be Tuesday, and the rhythm of human life would be lost. **Sacred time redeems personal time from vanishing...**Shabbos punctuates time’s flow, giving us the gift of coherence and structure. It is the cessation that allows us to live in the imprint of the work that has already been done. (15-17)

Here I should point out that Yom Kippur is called “Shabbat Shabbaton,” the Shabbat of all Shabbat’s. The greatest Shabbat of the year. The day in which we are to stop, focus, and take that pause. The day in which we are to regain our bearings, ask God for forgiveness and for the strength to move forward. The day in which we are to stop, reflect, and mark sacred time-*so that we might begin redeeming the time that we have wasted this year.*

*Our days are like a passing shadow, and a vanishing cloud, like a breeze that blows away and dust that scatters, like a dream that flies away.* we said in the Unetaneh Tokef. (Perhaps the author of the Unetaneh Tokef had one of those watches... ) There is only so much time allotted to each of us. How much is anyone's guess. Only God knows. But Yom Kippur is the day when we realize life is too precious to waste on distractions, on people and activities *that drain our energy and waste our time.*

How have you spent your time this past year? Do you take time to “rest” during each week? So many people make a conscious choice to “pause” on Yom Kippur. To come to this place, to join together in prayer, to remember those in our lives who were just here, sometimes sitting right next to us in a seat that is now empty, or occupied, painfully, by someone else. *But what about stopping more often?* How might each day be different if we stopped more frequently — taking time for a walk by ourselves or with a loved one, taking time to call a child or grandchild (not text — call, facetime call or zoom, even better!). How might each day be different if we stopped to make time for prayer, for a connection that is greater than any one of us as individuals? As I spoke about on Rosh Hashana: How might each week be different if we incorporated the consistent pause of Shabbat into our lives? *How might we learn to appreciate time in a different way, simply by challenging ourselves to keep track of, and be more intentional about, how we are spending it.*

In tenth grade I had a history teacher named Mr. Toretto. I don't remember one thing about that class. I don't even remember what type of history we were learning. But I do remember how Mr. Toretto greeted us each morning. He would stand at the front of the classroom and say: *Today, you are one day closer to your death.* Definitely bizarre, and perhaps something a teacher would get fired for today, but if I am giving him the benefit of the doubt his intentions were likely good. He was trying to tell us that each day mattered, that learning mattered, that we would do well to be aware of how we were using our hours and days and weeks.

Wasting time is a bad habit that, I fear, has gotten worse for many of us in recent years. There is a time and place for having some space to do nothing. Not every moment can be filled with the deepest meaning and purpose. But we have to be careful. I know that I am not the only one in this room who lectures children and grandchildren about how much "screen-time" they are doing on any given day. At the heart of the issue is my concern at just how much time is being "wasted" doing mindless activity (like scrolling through tik toks or youtube videos so quickly that it's impossible to even process what we are watching). Again, everything has its place, and sometimes mindless activity is totally fine. But we all know the feeling of getting lost down the rabbit hole of social media, editorials, mindless entertainment, or any other activity and suddenly "waking

up” to realize that hours have gone by and day is almost over. When this happens, we would do well to stop to ask ourselves: *Is this how I wanted to be spending my time today?* Usually- we don’t even stop to ask the question.

In a few moments we will stop to think about who we miss that is not here. But perhaps we should also ask ourselves who we miss **who is still here**.

Because here is the truth of this day; the truth of this moment as we reach yizkor.

Everyone’s time on this earth eventually runs out. If there are people that we are not giving enough attention to, that we miss; if there are activities that are important to us (that we have been meaning to get to)- *what are we waiting for?* It is true that there are only so many hours in a day. It is also true that there are only so many hours in a life.

The poet Charles Hanson Towne captured this message in the following poem:

*“Around the corner I have a friend  
In this great city that has no end;  
Yet days go by, and weeks rush on,  
And before I know it a year is gone.  
I never see my old friend’s face,  
For life is a swift and terrible race.  
He knows I like him just as well  
As in the days when I rang his bell  
And he rang mine. We were younger then,  
And now we are busy, tired men;  
Tired: with trying to make a name,*

*'Tomorrow, 'I say, 'I will call on Jim,  
Just to show that I'm thinking of him.'  
But tomorrow comes—and tomorrow goes,  
And the distance between grows and grows.  
Around the corner! Yet miles away. . .  
'Here's a telegram, sir. . . Jim died today. '  
And that's what we get, and deserve in the end.  
Around the corner, a vanished friend. "*

In a moment we will stop to remember. In a moment we may wonder to ourselves:

where has he gone, where has she gone, where have they gone? Weren't they just here?

Vanished friends. Vanished parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, children.

Why, oh why, aren't we more careful, more intentional, more thoughtful about the way that we spend our time? How do we want to spend our time differently this year? With whom do we want to create memories, with whom do we want to spend our precious time?

Our house is filled with memories. We have pictures on the walls of family members who are no longer with us. We have furniture that belonged to parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. We have boxes filled with letters from family members who have died. We have treasure troves of historical family documents telling us where we come from, and mementos from the wonderful lives lived. We have video, and audio

recordings of loved ones whose voices we can no longer hear, whose faces we can no longer see. I will sometimes sit quietly- reading, watching, or listening, alone with my memories, alone with my tears. We have tried so hard to make sure our kids know, in some measure, those who are no longer living. We have tried, so hard to make sure we don't forget those whose death left holes in our heart. But the truth is that I would trade all of these treasures for just one thing.

**More Time.** Just a few more minutes. Just a few more hours. Just one more day with those who are no longer here. I know that I am not alone in this feeling.

The clock is ticking. Time is running out- *for all of us*. Mr. Torretto was right- we are one day closer to our death. So what are we going to do about it? How are we going to spend the precious time we have left as the minutes on our life watch count down? Are we going to waste time, or are we going to treasure it? The choice is ours. *Gmar Hatimah Tovah.*