

Five hundred twenty-five thousand
Six hundred minutes,
Five hundred twenty-five thousand
Moments so dear.
Five hundred twenty-five thousand
Six hundred minutes
How do you measure, measure a year?

In daylights, in sunsets, in midnights
In cups of coffee
In inches, in miles, in laughter, in strife.

In five hundred twenty-five thousand
Six hundred minutes
How do you measure
A year in the life?

These words from Rent's *Seasons of Love* pose a great question. How do you measure a year of your life? This is the question we are supposed to ask ourselves during our High Holy Day season. The Jewish calendar creates this time of self-reflection for us, when we are nudged a little to think about our past year. Was it a year filled with happiness? Was it a year filled with anger? A year of success or a year that could have been more successful? What were the key moments that served as benchmarks for your year? Could you describe this past year using one single word?

Because we all want to make our moments count, we must strive to take the ordinary moments in life and make them holy. We all try and make our moments count. We want our lives to matter, to be remembered for a blessing. One way we can make our moments holy is to slow down.

Rachael Macy Stafford recently wrote an article for the *Huffington Post* titled, *The Day I Stopped Saying Hurry Up*.

“When you're living a distracted life, every minute must be accounted for. You feel like you must be checking something off the list, staring at a screen, or rushing off to the next destination. And no matter how many ways you divide your time and attention, no matter how many duties you try and multi-task, there's never enough time in a day to ever catch up.”

That was Macy's life for two frantic years. Her thoughts and actions were controlled by electronic notifications, ring tones and jam-packed agendas. And although every fiber of her inner drill sergeant wanted to be on time to every activity on her overcommitted schedule, she wasn't.

You see, six years ago, she was blessed with a laid-back, carefree, stop-and-smell-the roses type of child.

When Macy needed to be out the door, her daughter was taking her sweet time picking out a purse and a glittery crown.

When she needed to grab a quick lunch at Subway, her daughter would stop to speak to the elderly woman who looked like her grandma.

Her carefree child was a gift to her Type A, task-driven nature, but she did

not see it. Oh, no! When you live life distracted, you have tunnel vision, only looking ahead to what's next on the agenda. And anything that cannot be checked off the list is a waste of time.

Consequently, the two words she most commonly spoke to her little lover of life were *hurry up*.

She started her sentences with it: *Hurry up, we're gonna be late.*

She ended sentences with it: *We're going to miss everything if you don't hurry up.*

She started her day with it: *Hurry up and eat your breakfast. Hurry up and get dressed.*

She ended her day with it: *Hurry up and brush your teeth. Hurry up and get in bed.*

And although the words *hurry up* did little if nothing to increase her child's speed, she said them anyway. Maybe even more than the words *I love you*.

Then, one fateful day, things changed. Macy had just picked her older daughter up from kindergarten and they were getting out of the car. When her little sister was not going fast enough for her older daughter's liking, Macy's older daughter said, "You are so slow." And when she crossed her arms and let out an exasperated sigh, Macy saw herself – and it was a gut-wrenching sight.

Macy realized she was a bully who pushed and pressured and hurried a small child who simply wanted to enjoy life. Macy's eyes were opened; she saw with clarity the damage her hurried existence was doing to both of her children. Voice trembling, she looked into her small child's eyes and said, "I am so sorry I have been making you hurry. I love that you take your time, and I want to be more like you."

Both her daughters looked equally surprised by her painful admission, but her younger daughter's face held the unmistakable glow of validation and acceptance.

Macy found it was pretty easy to banish *hurry up* from her vocabulary. What was not so easy was acquiring the patience to wait for her leisurely child.

When they took walks or went to the store, Macy allowed her to set the pace. And when she stopped to admire something, Macy would push thoughts of her agenda out of her head and simply observe her daughter. She witnessed expressions on her face that she'd never seen before. She studied dimples on her hands and the way her eyes crinkled up when she smiled. She saw the way other people responded to her stopping to take time to talk to them. Her daughter was a *noticer*, and she quickly learned that the *noticers* of the world are rare and beautiful gifts.

Macy's promise to slow down was made almost three years ago. At the same time, she began her journey to let go of daily distraction and grasp what matters in life. Macy's younger daughter is her living reminder of why she must keep trying. In fact, the other day, she reminded Macy once again.

The two of them had taken a bike ride to a snow-cone shack. After purchasing a cool treat for her daughter, she sat down at a picnic table with her daughter, who was delightedly admiring the icy tower she held in her hand.

Suddenly, a look of worry came across her face, "Do I have to rush, Mama?"

Macy could have cried. Perhaps the scars of a hurried life don't ever completely disappear.

As Macy's child looked up at her, waiting to know if she could take her time, Macy knew she had a choice. She could sit there in sorrow thinking about the number of times she rushed her child through life... or she could celebrate the fact that today she is trying to do things differently.

"You don't have to rush. Just take your time," Macy said gently. Her whole face instantly brightened and her shoulders relaxed.

And so they sat side-by-side talking about things that 6-year-olds talk about. There were even moments when they sat in silence, just smiling at each other and admiring the sights and sounds around them.

Macy thought her child was going to eat the whole darned thing – but when she got to the last bite, she held out a spoonful of ice crystals and sweet juice for Macy. "I saved the last bite for you, Mama," Macy's daughter said proudly.

When Macy hurried through life, or hurried her daughter through life, she was not able to see the holiness in the everyday, yet her 6-year-old *noticer* saw the holiness in the present moments, the elderly and in the sights and sounds of nature. When Macy slowed down, she, too, was able to see dimples, the inner beauty of her daughter and the world around her.

In truths that she learned
Or in times that he cried
In bridges he burned
Or the way that she died
It's time now, to sing out
Though the story never ends
Let's celebrate Remember a year in the life of friends

Consider the year we're leaving behind. Think back to last year's High Holy Days. What was different? Were you cancer free then? Was a beloved family member still around? Or maybe you were in a much darker place than you are today. How would you measure your year? In Mondays, in phone calls, meetings, baths, dinner parties, school days, vacations, doctors' appointments, test results or the times that you cried. There are lots of ways to measure a year, and now is the time to measure yours. Measure your year, your choices, your life.

Are you a person who makes lists? I am a list maker. It's fulfilling when I am able to check things off and even better once I can throw out an entire list. Do you have a countdown clock? These clocks count down until a due date or vacation, a family event. Really, you can buy these countdown clocks you can put on your desk, and they come with themed faces that pop on and off. You can reset them for whatever you are counting down to. They are quite neat and quite dangerous. The trouble with counting down is that by constantly looking to the future, you are never in the present moment. Holiness is found in appreciating the present, no matter what the present is.

I am always looking forward. In college, I figured out a way to make my time as productive as possible. Because I was eager to go to rabbinical school, my whole goal was to get through college quickly. Then, in rabbinical school, I counted down the days

until I was back in the US and then counted down each year through assignments, papers, holidays and breaks. It's pretty silly. I was not miserable, yet I was obsessed with the next thing, the next stage, the next achievement.

I am trying not to count down but to enjoy. It is terribly hard for me. Three years ago when I was struggling with a liminal moment, in limbo waiting to see where my family would settle down, I was moaning to a friend about waiting. Because I hate waiting, I assumed that everyone hated waiting or not knowing. Yet she wisely pointed out that her sister loved not knowing. Not knowing can be looked at as a blessing: when there is not a defined path, every direction is open. This was eye opening. Holiness can be found in the unmarked path, in the liminal moments, in waiting!

On the simplest level, the High Holy Days are about waking up. They are a ritual reminder that **this** life is the only one we have and we need to pay attention in order to not waste it. We need to ask ourselves who we are and what we are doing here –at this moment in our lives, in this world. We need to ask ourselves what in our life needs to change. And how can we change it? In Hebrew, these days are called Days of Awe, days filled with awe, with wonder and gratitude, gratitude for the gift of life and all of its blessing – and also with terror, the terror that comes from really confronting life's fragility.

We use this time of year for *tikkun nefesh*, repairing ourselves. Remembering the year about to end, we take an accounting of our lives.

The time is here to take an accounting of your year and your soul. What are the recurring moments of your life that you could use to measure your year? Can you measure it by how often you did something nice for others? Did you take time to volunteer, making the world a happier, safer or more beautiful place? Did you watch the news, possibly on immigration reform, and get moved to action? Did you spend enough time with your family? Did you take care of yourself? Did you pick up the book you have been meaning to read or start the new hobby? Did you care enough to explore your own soul?

There are lots of ways to measure one's life. The question is: what's the right way to measure your life? What has filled your time? Are you proud of the choices you've made?

Five hundred twenty-five thousand, six hundred minutes. How did **you** spend them? In which moments did you find holiness?

Other than counting down to get through something, hurrying up to move on to the next big thing, we are also great at packing our schedules so tightly that we feel fine putting off doing things we need to do. Really, I know first hand that this is a tactic! If we are sooo busy then we can't fit in something we don't want to do.

I am talking about *teshuva*, turning back, apologizing. By nature, most of us avoid conflict, and we don't love apologizing when we are wrong. So we keep our selves distracted. We calendar ourselves, fill our moments and run from one thing to the next to avoid apologizing, to avoid turning back.

Life is too short. We need to apologize today because tomorrow might be too late. There are many gut wrenching stories about missed opportunities to apologize.

While preparing to write this sermon, I dug hard and realized that I am lucky I have yet to lose a loved one while we were in a dispute. But many people I spoke with had their own version of a similar story.

February 29, 1968. It was leap day, an “extra day.” Late winter. But while much of the country remained buried with snow, Julie walked home from the school bus under an impossibly bright blue sky in Southern California, with Santa Ana winds blowing the warm air off the desert and over her neighborhood.

She was 16, a high school sophomore. Julie was hugely relieved to be finished with a big class project. She felt quite carefree, ready to hop in the family car and return the library books she’d used for it, along with the ones her friend Penny had borrowed for an assignment of her own. She’d had to do some extra work to make up for her English teacher’s dissatisfaction with a paper she’d written.

Penny was Julie’s “best friend from temple” since they were eight. Their families lived very close, about 10 minutes away. And the summer before that sophomore year, they’d taken the train together from LA to San Jose, to attend Camp Swig, where Julie took pretty seriously her instructions to run like crazy to the camp nurse for the antidote should Penny get stung by a bee.

But that previous year had been a little rocky. It started when Penny resented that Julie was assigned the *Torah* reading at their Confirmation, which she wanted to do more than the *Haftorah* reading that she was given. Julie didn’t know how to deal with that: she didn’t make the decision – the Rabbi did. Julie’s dilemma was how to savor the opportunity to shine without causing Penny pain. Julie didn’t gloat...but she also wasn’t able to say, “I’m sorry this happened in a way that made you feel bad.”

They’d reconnected over Julie helping Penny get the resources she needed from the library to complete a huge English paper she was worried about. Julie thought maybe things were looking up for their friendship.

As Julie turned the corner between the bus stop and her house, she saw her mother standing in the doorway, behind the screen door. And she didn’t look right. Her mom insisted she come in and sit down, because they “needed to talk.” She remembers the moment in vivid detail: The couch was green. The light in the living room was very bright. Her mother said, “There was an accident on the way to Penny’s high school this morning. Penny was hit by a car. She died.” Julie’s brain could not quite get that. And the sense of surrealness lasted a long, long time.

Julie learned quite abruptly about the Jewish practices of mourning. She spent a lot of time at Penny’s house. There were lots of people. Lots of food. Several moments with Penny’s mother, shaking their heads together in disbelief, sitting in Penny’s room, which looked, remarkably, just like it did back when she was still alive. It all seemed very strange. Julie had never seen her father cry before...but during the funeral, he could hardly stop.

And here’s what Julie kept thinking: Turns out that Penny’s feared English paper didn’t matter much at all. As big as it had loomed for her, in the overall scheme of things, it was a nothing. And it turns out that who read the *Torah* and who read the *Haftorah* – and the entire Confirmation service – was no big deal either. Julie wished she’d known that before. She wished she’d known it in time. She wished she’d said, “I’m sorry.” Because as it turns out, there are no “extra” days.

Your moment is today. Pick up the phone or start on the keyboard and turn back! Apologize this year.

Make sure you always say I love you before hanging up the phone or saying good-bye! It makes a difference, not only in making the moment holy, but it can measure your life.

Five hundred twenty-five thousand
Six hundred minutes!
Five hundred twenty-five thousand
Journeys to plan.
Five hundred twenty-five thousand
Six hundred minutes
How do you measure the life
Of a woman or a man?

A famous Hasidic rabbi from the early 19th century, The Kotzker Rebbe, teaches that our actions are “the visible traces of our character in this world.” What do your actions say about you? Do your actions create moments of holiness? If someone were to describe you, would they mention your philanthropic nature? Will you leave traces of your social action work in the world? Are you an involved room parent or dedicated volunteer? Maybe your kindness to others always shines through.

This High Holy Day season, my hope for us all is that by reflecting on the year that just ended, we can make better choices and decisions in the year we are now beginning.

Prominent progressive Rabbi Harold Kushner writes about potential for our Jewish traditions to help us reflect and refocus our lives. “Judaism can save your life from being wasted, from being spent on the trivial....Judaism is a way of making sure that you don’t spend your whole life, with its potential for holiness, on simply eating, sleeping, and paying your bills. It is a guide to investing your life in things that really matter, so that your **life** will matter. It comes to teach you how to transform pleasure into joy and celebration, how to feel like an extension of God by doing what God does, taking the ordinary and making it holy.”

Over the next year, may we all be moved to strive for the good instead of the mundane. May we act in a way that would make God proud, and, more importantly, may we make ourselves proud of the choices we make. Decide now what word you want to be able to use to describe the coming year.

This year, may we be the best versions of ourselves, spending every minute of the year we can on living a life measured by moments of goodness.

Measure in Love
Seasons of Love
Seasons of Love