



**THINGS I LEARNED...** While teaching everyone else

# “TIME IS MONEY, HONEY!”

So don't waste it

**BY RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN**



**SO, IT APPEARS LIKELY THAT WHEN YOU WILL** get to read this column, the detested Covid contagion will still be with us to one degree or another. I am, generally, a very patient man. But, at some point, my patience does begin to wear thin. This is definitely one of those times.

One of the silver linings in this horrible pandemic, though, is that most people have much more time on their hands. But, of course, it is only silver if we use it wisely. Otherwise we can go meshuga completely, G-d forbid!

Personally, I have finally been able to return with a vengeance to one of my favourite pastimes, which is reading. I have finished more books during lockdown than I had in the last three years! I have also enjoyed the unusual pleasure for a rabbi of “not working on Shabbos!” My wife, Rochel, and I have been relishing the quiet, peaceful, and

serene Shabbos experience. Obviously, we can't wait to get back to shul and to having guests again (and being invited out), but I must confess to having savoured the opportunity to daven at my own pace, learn, and go for walks together, which never happened in “normal” times with the hectic Shabbos schedule.

So, for me, having some spare time for myself has been one fortunate windfall during this most unfortunate time.

In fact, maybe it's time for us to talk about... time.

From my own experience, I now know that if something is important, I better attend to it immediately, otherwise I simply don't trust myself to “get around to it”. I know I could benefit from a Time Management course. In fact, I once signed up for one, but I never made it there. No time. There are still

so many new ideas, projects, and plans I'd like to get around to. I know that, with better personal discipline, they might actually materialise.

You might be surprised to learn that effective time management is not only a professional value, but also a religious imperative. “Time is money,” they say. Well then, to waste someone else's time is to waste their money. Stealing time from a busy person is the equivalent of stealing his money. And wasting our own time is wasting our own money, certainly an unacceptable habit if you had a Jewish mother. From a moral and ethical perspective, “killing time” really is a capital crime. A day wasted is a day lost. An hour wasted is irretrievable. Yes, tomorrow has another 24 hours, but today's hours have, sadly, been squandered forever. The Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom Ber of Lubavitch, once said, “A summer's day and a winter's night is... a year!”

In this day of smartphones and instant global communication, does anyone still use “snail mail”? And who remembers sending postcards? And what about the old “picture postcard”? For the younger generation I will explain. When people travelled on holiday, especially to overseas destinations, they would buy a postcard which, on one side, was filled with a beautiful scenic picture of the place they were at. Half of the other side of the postcard was used for the address. The other half had room for a brief message, the classic one being: “Wish you were here!”

I heard an insightful analogy on this theme in the name of the saintly

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## “A SUMMER’S DAY AND A WINTER’S NIGHT IS... A YEAR!”

Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan. Though I must confess that I cannot imagine the saintly rabbi ever buying a picture postcard, I have it on good authority that he actually once said, “Life is like a picture postcard.”

Maybe some of our more mature, seasoned travellers had the experience of being on holiday and sending a picture postcard home or to a friend. What so often would happen is that we would start writing with a large scrawl, but then, as we were writing, we’d think of new things to say. Before we knew it, we would find ourselves at the end of the card with no more room to write. So, what would we do? We had no choice but to start writing smaller, and then still smaller, and then when we would be out of space, we would start winding our words around the edges of the card to get it all in. Before we knew it, we were turning the card upside down to squeeze in the last few vital words of our message.

Did you ever have that experience? I certainly did. Well, isn’t life just like that? We start off young and reckless, without a worry in the world, and as we get older we realise that life is shorter than we imagined. So, we start cramming, and trying to squeeze in all those important things we never got around to over the years. Sometimes our attempts are quite desperate, even pathetic, as we seek to put some meaning into our lives before it’s too late. (Maybe that’s what a mid-life crisis is all about.)

One of the books my wife has been reading now is a biography of Maimonides, the great Rambam. The recent global Siyum HaRambam commemorated by tens of thousands of Jews who study his works daily spurred new interest in this colossal giant of Jewish scholarship. Maimonides spent much of his early life fleeing death and danger. His family were forced to flee Spain which was being overrun by the fanatical Muslim Almohads.

What I cannot get over is that, as a young man, he was writing his famous commentary on the Mishnah while on the run! The presence of mind, equanimity, and time management skills to do that are simply astounding! And part of that work contains the Rambam’s famous 13 Principles of Faith which we sing in Yigdal on Friday nights and which have become cornerstones of Jewish belief.

A virtual human search engine, he didn’t reach the age of 70 and yet managed to author the Mishne Torah, the world’s first Encyclopaedia of Jewish Law organised by subject, as well as the Guide for the Perplexed, the towering classic of Jewish philosophy – all while practicing as a physician to support his family. What an icon in using time wisely and productively!

I learned that, at the end of the day, we make time for whatever is important to us.

So, whatever it is that is worthwhile for each of us to get done, please G-d, we will all get around to it and make it happen. May it be sooner rather than later. **■**



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