

Rosh HaShanah Day 2- 5774 (September, 2013)

Running on Reserve Battery Battery: How to Recharge

by Rabbi Lisa Malik, Ph.D.

As a rabbi, I often use a verse or two from the Torah as the starting point of a *drash* or sermon.

But today, I'm going to *drash* on some 'verses' that come from a more modern source: **my laptop computer:**

"You are running on reserve battery power.

Your computer will go to sleep in a few minutes

to preserve the contents of memory".

This was the alert message that flashed across my laptop computer screen as I sat down to write the final paragraphs of this sermon.

As you may know, Moses, Moshe Rabaynu, received **inspiration in the most unlikely of places.** God's appearance in the *S'neh*, the Burning Bush, comes to teach us that God is manifest everywhere: from the lowliest of plants to the highest mountain peak. Every *s'neh*, even a little shrub, has the potential to convey a revelation as powerful as the Revelation at Sinai .

While I am not claiming that I am like Moses or that God literally spoke to me through my computer (!), I certainly was inspired by my laptop's message:

"You are running on reserve battery power.

Your computer will go to sleep in a few minutes

to preserve the contents of memory".

Think about the last time that you may have received a message like this on your **computer** or your **cell phone**.

Even though your iPhone may have had 100% charge at the beginning of the day, by mid-afternoon, you may be down to 20% charge. And this may sometimes happen even if you actually never used your phone that day to have a phone conversation. Between texting, using the GPS, taking photos, and checking emails, your phone can get sapped of its charge very quickly. If you are a teenager, or if you are the parent or grandparent of one, you may run out of charge even more quickly because you may have that smart phone in your hand continuously throughout the day: constantly on Twitter, Instagram, & Snap Chat. How many teens have to be reminded by their parents, & how many adults have to be reminded as well, to put the phone down during dinner time... or any other occasion when someone is trying to have a real face-to-face conversation with you?

I will never forget the time when I was on vacation & was struck by the romantic scene of a newlywed couple, walking alongside each other on the beach, still in their wedding clothes. But when I took a closer look, I realized that the setting was not as romantic as it had seemed at first. Both the bride and the groom were texting or otherwise busy on their phones, perhaps communicating with someone else, but certainly **not communicating with each other**. This man and woman were in close physical proximity to each other, but there was an apparent **lack of connection** between them. What in the world could each of them have been so busy with that they couldn't just bask in each other's company on their wedding day?! Was one of them playing "Words with Friends" and other posting a photo on Facebook?

So many of us are more connected to our phones and other technological devices, than we are to other human beings or to our immediate surroundings.

I recently saw someone wearing a T-shirt that read,

“The Internet is down, so I’m outside today.”

Funny, right? But, sad as well....sad that we spend so much time on the Internet that we usually don’t appreciate, or even notice, the beauty of the great outdoors.

I am as guilty of **Internet addiction** as some of you may be. So much so that I felt the need to ‘detox’ by going on a **technology-free retreat** for one week this summer. And while I spent much of that time connecting with nature and with other people face-to-face, the feeling of relaxation and general wellbeing that I felt was short-lived.

Because when I returned to work from that retreat and from vacation with my family, I had to face the reality of **1,187 unread messages in my email inbox**. Yes, you heard me correctly: 1,187. Even though over 500 of these messages were Spam, that still left **687** messages that weren’t! And **175** of those messages were emails that had to be answered at some point because they were addressed directly to me by Temple Beth Ahm staff, congregants, or relatives of congregants.

While **technology** certainly offers the benefit and convenience of 24/7 accessibility, it also has the potential to **overload and overwhelm us**.

This past May, 60,000 **Orthodox** men attended an **anti-Internet rally** that was held at the NY Mets' stadium at Citi Field. The participants in this rally communicated or bought into the message that we should severely curtail our Internet usage and our children's access to the Internet. Parents were urged to remove Internet access from their homes or to set up enough filters that children would only be able to go onto educational websites.

The person who told me about this rally was actually one of the members of the 2 Orthodox organizations that did not participate in this anti-technology conference. He told me that the Satmar Hasidim refused to participate because the speakers spoke in English instead of Yiddish. And he told me that he and other Chabad Jews refused to participate because they didn't oppose technology; they were actually big proponents of the Internet.

At first, I was on the side of Chabad, agreeing with this gentleman, that it was insular and misguided to avoid Internet usage.

However, when I reflected back upon that conversation, I realized that **a part of me agreed with some of the messages of that conference.** Perhaps 24/7 access to technology is not such a good thing. **Perhaps we do spend too much time on our computers and our cell phones.**

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And **perhaps some of the problems of 21<sup>st</sup> century life go even beyond our being constantly busy with our technological devices.**

Perhaps it's not just technology that's the problem. Perhaps the computer and phone usage is just **symptomatic of a larger problem: our being busy period.** So many of us live hectic lives, with lifestyles that are often frenetic.

When people come to see me at the shul, or contact me by phone or email, their first words are often, "I'm sorry to bother you, Rabbi. You must be so **busy**." So many congregants assume that I am **busy**.

And by many definitions, I am./ But, I'm not the only one.  
Everyone is busy these days.... perhaps too busy.

There is a **midrash in Braisheet Rabbah** (8:5) that teaches:  
**When God came to create Adam & Eve, the ministering angels ("malachey ha-sharet") formed themselves into groups, some of them saying, "Let human beings be created," while others urged, "May human beings not be created."**

**Rabbi Huna Rabbah of Tzipori, said:**  
**"While the ministering angels were arguing and disputing with each other, God created human beings."**

**God turned to the angels and said to them,**  
**"Mah atem m'daynin?! Kvar na-asah Adam."**  
**'What's the use of all of your arguing?**  
**Human beings have already been made!"**

The angels were **so busy** arguing that they **messed out** on the Creation of Humanity!

In many respects, our Jewish tradition inspires us to be like the angels- that is one of the reasons why it is customary to dress in white or wear a **kittel** on Yom Kippur. But, in this case, with respect to this *Midrash*, I think that we're better off not emulating the angels. Perhaps we can surpass the angels by **catching ourselves when we are rushing around being too busy**.

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Now, I want to go back to the message that flashed across the screen of my computer:

"Your computer will go to sleep in a few minutes to preserve the contents of memory"-----

With computers, **sleep mode** is an efficient way of **preserving the contents of memory** without shutting the computer down altogether.

With **human beings**, do we have a "**sleep mode**" that enables us to "preserve the contents of memory"?

The beginning of an answer to these questions is provided by **Dr. Wendy Mogel**, the psychologist who wrote the **Jewish parenting book**, entitled, **The Blessing of a Skinned Knee** (Chapter 9: The Blessing of Time: Teaching Your Child the Value of the Present Moment, p. 209) Dr. Mogel shares the story a mother, who is concerned about her child, and tries to set up a meeting with her rabbi:

The woman says: "Rabbi, can you talk to my son, Jordan? He's angry all of the time and I know something is bothering him. Maybe it's the divorce, maybe it's something going on with his friends. I don't know, but you seem to be able to get the kids to talk. Can I bring him in to see you?"

The **rabbi** then offers a few options of times: "How about this Wednesday, some time between 4:30 and 8:15 PM?"

To which the mom responds, "No, that won't work. Jordan has basketball practice on Wednesdays."// The **rabbi** then offers a time on Thursday.

To which the mom responds, "No, that's not good either. That's when he has his math tutor." // The **rabbi** offers yet another time.

"No good," says the woman. "Jordan has his guitar lesson at that time."

The rabbi sees that this young person's appointment calendar is even **busier** than his own. The rabbi believes that he may already know what Jordan is angry about.

We are an **ambitious and industrious** generation of parents, but the combination of these two potentially admirable traits pollutes our relationships from time to time.

“The future flips into the past, amid a blur of weary winter-morning wake-ups, lists of spelling words, multiplication tables, karate lessons, soccer games and practices, birthday parties, and play dates.”

To most people, using **time** well means knowing how to squeeze more time out of it. Yet, managing time by squeezing it harder certainly doesn't work when you're raising children or when you're trying to live a physically and spiritually healthy existence.

Time can be seen as a resource to be utilized or as a treasure to be enjoyed. **Judaism asks us to do both.**

Slowing down the clock takes as much effort and concentration as getting things done. In order to use time well, we must work to protect it as assiduously as we guard the health and education of our families and of ourselves.

But **how** do we do this? How do we slow down the clock and learn to use time well?

Judaism has a blueprint for rest, reflection, and renewal. Our tradition provides for a “sleep mode” that is called “Shabbat.”

When we incorporate the observance of Shabbat into our lives, we give ourselves the gift of physical and spiritual rest, reflection, and renewal.

In today's day and age, we have to consciously stop ourselves from being so **busy**.

We live in a society where **over-booking, over-scheduling, and running from one activity to the next** is the norm of our existence.

Sometimes, like the laptop computer, we just need to go into **“sleep mode.”**

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The Rabbis were mindful of the dangers of a hurried life. Fortunately, they had a powerful antidote built into the Torah. God had commanded it right up front, during the Creation of the world. Just minutes after creating time itself, God created a means of protecting it.

**God worked very hard. In 6 days, God made the heavens, the earth, the seas, day, night, the sun, the moon, the stars, gold fish, hummingbirds, lizards, tigers, Adam & Eve:**

**God then sat back and said, "I am pleased. My work is good."**

Check out this attitude. None of our perfectionistic, it's-never-good-enough anxiety, no work-a-holism, no 24-7.

**God liked what God saw.**

Then, what happened next?

*"Va-y'chulu"* All the work of Creation was completed on the sixth day.

**And on the seventh day, God stopped working.**

**God blessed the 7<sup>th</sup> day and made it holy because on that day God rested from all of the work God had set out to do.**

God's job had a **beginning and an end.**

When God was finished, God stopped and rested for an entire day.

**Not long after this, God commanded everybody else to do the same thing.**

***"Sheshet yamim taaseh m'lachtecha. U-va-yom ha-shevii Shabbat l'Adonai Elohecha."***

**"Six days you shall labor and do all of your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of Adonai your God."**

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In the biblical phrase, "And God rested", the Hebrew words for "rest" are "Shabbat" and "Va-yinafash." "**Va-yinafash**" is a form of the Hebrew word, "nefesh", which means "**soul**". In the rest of Shabbat, **our souls are renewed**. By means of the Jewish "**sleep mode**" that we call Shabbat, we provide ourselves with the precious opportunity for **spiritual and physical rest**.

Perhaps this is why the Zionist writer, *Achad Ha-Am*, wrote:  
**"More than Israel has kept Shabbat,  
Shabbat has kept Israel."**

**Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel**, the Conservative rabbi, philosopher, and social activist (who walked alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. 48 years ago (March 21, 1965) ) at the Civil Rights March in Alabama, considered Shabbat to be a "**sanctuary in time.**"

Yes, **Shabbat is analogous to a computer's "sleep mode"**.

- 1) Shabbat enables us to become **spiritually rested** and renewed.
  
- 2) **Shabbat provides us with an opportunity to get away from 24/7 technology access and busy-ness.** By **disconnecting** the cell phone, or by simply not answering the phone or checking e-mail on Shabbat, we have an opportunity to **truly connect**: with ourselves, with God, with others, and with our environment. Shabbat provides us with the time and opportunity to rediscover ourselves, to stop & appreciate the world around us.
  
- 3) **Shabbat gives us back the world's most precious commodity: time.** If we try to observe Shabbat, we can stop rushing around for one full day. We can give ourselves the gift of one day when we have nowhere to go but synagogue, home, and to our family's or friends' homes for Shabbos meals. We can just be. We can think. Reflect. Search our innermost selves to remember the essentials of life. Connect with God and others.
  
- 4) Shabbat provides us with an opportunity to literally go into "sleep mode" by taking a Shabbos nap, or to approach a spiritual state of "sleep mode" by taking off from work, dance practice or soccer games, and by refraining from using the phone or computer or engaging in any of the 39 *melachot*, those actions that are reminiscent of the creation of the *Mishkan*, the portable Sanctuary in the wilderness during biblical times. In the words of Judith Shulewitz, author of the book, "The Sabbath World," "We have to remember to stop because we have to stop to remember." In an adapted version of the words of my laptop computer, "**You are running on reserve battery power. You should go into Shabbat sleep mode to preserve the contents of memory**".

