

Caffeine and Connection

Rabbi Mo Koval / Parsha Baha'alot'cha / June 17, 2022

"Sometimes you will never know the value of a moment until it becomes a memory"- Dr. Seuss

That is an actual quote from the legendary Dr. Seuss. I know it doesn't sound very Dr. Seuss-like. You're likely thinking, "Come on, now. If that was really Dr. Seuss, the quote would be more like: Oh no, oh no! The moments shall go! The memories you know will melt like wet snow!" Or something like that. Either way, I'll get back to the quote (and, hopefully, my point) in a moment.

As a parent of five wonderful children, I am often kicking myself for not spending enough time with them. In my heart, I am absolutely certain of the importance of doing so, but, valid excuse or not... life happens. And as the children grow older, I realize more and more that it doesn't matter how trivial or insignificant that time spent together may seem. A simple five-minute car trip together to the gas station (even without buying a slushee!) might have more of an impact on a child than we care to admit.

Sundays are great for mowing the lawn but I know it won't kill me to put the lawn-mowing on pause if I can spend a little time playing baseball catch with my son. (Side note: someone ELSE might kill me for the lawn looking the way it does but that's not my fault! Come to think of it, I really hope my wife is not reading this. There is no benefit in reminding her of my dereliction of lawn duty.)

Or, for example, I could be doing a million things around the house, but if my daughter finished her homework and is bored (this is a common theme when your daughter is, thankfully, studious enough to finish her homework in under ten minutes), whatever I'm doing could probably wait while I take fifteen minutes to play a game of Boggle with her. And so on and so forth. And while I will readily admit I don't spend as much time with my children as I would like, I do try to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

Recently I had a whole new appreciation of this concept. The Jewish world celebrated the holiday of Shavuot during which we recognized the incredible gift that we received from God at Mount Sinai some 3,300 years ago. Believe it or not, Shavuot is about more than just eating cheesecake, though I did more than my fair share of that "mitzvah" too!

The Torah is the bedrock of Judaism and indeed, it behooves us all to spend as much time as possible studying the Torah. On Shavuot, there is a widespread custom to spend the

entire night (or as much of it as we can) learning Torah. My teenage son offered to come study with me and I gladly took him up on the offer. We walked into the synagogue at 12:45 am and the place was packed to the rafters. People of all ages were sitting there, many with coffees in hand, firing away on all cylinders. The energy was palpable.

I was determined to make the most of my opportunity to learn with my son and the adrenaline rush had me wide awake as we plowed our way through the beginning of the Talmudic tractate of Sukkah. I was on such a high that I had no idea an hour-and-a-half had passed when we looked up at the clock on the wall and saw it read 2:15 am. I sat back and soaked in the scene. What a beautiful site to behold!

I welled up at the thought of how lucky we are to be a part of such a glorious nation. It dawned on me that here we are, an entire room of people, and across the world, many such roomfuls of people, fulfilling the mitzvah of v'shinantam l'venecha ("you shall teach your children"), passing the torch of our precious heritage on to another generation.

On a more humorous note, the non-Jewish custodian walked in at 4:30 am to clean up and, from the look on his face, you could tell he was not prepared for the scene in front of him. To walk into that packed room at that hour of the night, and see all those people studying, some as young as 10 years old, with the decibel level approaching that of a football stadium, was NOT what he was expecting.

Anyway, back to my son, I realized that as wonderful and memorable as all the times we spend together are, in the backyard, in the car, at a baseball game, on vacation, or simply on our living room couch, nothing quite compares to the feeling of spending that time together on such lofty and holy pursuits. It's hard to describe the feeling but it felt like much more than merely connecting with my son. The two of us together were connecting with the One Above.

It was easily the highlight of my holiday and I sat there soaking it all in. In a world in which, too often, we don't stop and appreciate life's special moments in "real time" this was a thrilling exception. May we merit to always appreciate the precious times we have with our families, and, at least once in a while, may those times be filled with spirituality!