

The first few weeks after Avi was born were spent in a warm fuzzy haze of abundant love, sleeplessness, feedings, and diaper changes. We brought this tiny tiny human home from the hospital, and he just slept, cried, and ate, seemingly not noticing the world around him or his family fawning over him.

But one day, around 3 in the morning, Avi was hungry. I went through the usual routine. Made the bottle, yawned while walking upstairs, and started feeding my baby son. But that night for the very first time, Avi smiled at me. His first little toothless smile lasted just ONE SECOND. Having a baby was huge and life changing. Having a baby made me a father. But that first smile, that one second in time, made me a parent.

What if I had missed it? What if I had been too distracted by the time or had been checking my phone? One second, maybe less, of my newborn son's smile... and it completely changed how I understood my place in the world.

These small but deeply meaningful moments occur all the time. Maybe not every day. But often enough that if we're paying attention, we can find a myriad of reasons to be inspired, moved, and humbled. It might be noticing a beautiful sunset, or an unexpectedly meaningful conversation with a neighbor. Maybe you'll notice the older couple holding hands at the movies. Or the kids on KKBE's new Robin Shuler Playground playing a game of tag and making a cacophony of happy noise.

Along those lines, we've been given an incredible gift this year. I don't know if you noticed it or not, but it's something people have been searching for for a long long time. The Fountain of Youth, Dorian Grey, every exercise device advertised on late night TV promises it. It's the gift of more time.

Did you notice the gift of extra time this year? Did it feel extra long? Did you get anything extra accomplished?

No? You didn't notice? The gift of time we received was AN ENTIRE extra second, added on June 30th, just between

11:59pm and 12:00am. One whole second! Isn't it an amazing gift!?!?!?

Oh... you didn't feel it? Didn't notice that all your clocks were off just a bit? Hmm... I mean... an extra second isn't that big a deal, is it?

But a single second can mean so much! And just getting this extra second was such hard work!

The tracking of this extra second was truly a cosmic effort, the explanation of which requires at least a BA in astronomy. I'll try and sum it up briefly, with help from Ira Flatow, host of NPR's Science Friday.

As the moon orbits the earth and creates our ocean tides, a tiny fraction of the earth's momentum is transferred to the moon, like they're connected with an elastic band. And each time the tide goes back and forth the earth slows down juuuust a bit thanks to the forces of angular momentum... whatever that is. So in order to keep our watches and clocks in sync with the moon, sun, and the rest of our solar system, every now and

then, the International Earth Rotation and Reference Systems Service (Which I imagine operates from a Dr. Evil-esqe bunker deep below the Swiss Alps) decides that we need to add an extra second to our clocks in order to stay in time with the rest of the galaxy. And thanks to the IERRSS (for those time geeks in the know) adding a leap second on June 30th, we are now in perfect sync with the universe.

All this math, all these scientists, all of the precise measurements stretching over thousands and millions of miles, all for just one extra second. Is it worth it? What does one second really matter??

It doesn't seem like much, but some of the most powerful, life changing moments take just that much time. It only takes a second to see your newborn son smile for the first time. It only takes a second to say "I love you." Or to say "I'm sorry." It only takes a second to reach out and take the hand of someone in pain. It only takes a second to begin to change your mind, or set a goal, or change your heart.

And because huge meaning can come in small moments, they can be easy to miss.

In the story of the Burning Bush, Torah tells us that “When God saw that Moses had turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush.” It sounds as if the bush was burning all along, ever since the creation of the world. But nobody had bothered to stop and notice the miracle right in front of them. God was there in the Burning Bush, just waiting for someone to realize it. But until Moses nobody stopped to notice.

Moses was made the leader of the Jewish people because he noticed the Bat Kol, the “still small voice” of God speaking out of a burning bush. He noticed that small miracle that everyone before him failed to perceive. Either they were too busy, too skeptical, or too self-absorbed. In the moment it took Moses to realize the miracle, his life, and the history of the world was forever altered.

Being mindful and noticing every moment, every second, takes a massive amount of concentration and mental stamina. And it gets harder as we get older.

Our very perception of time changes as we age. When we are young, summers seem to last forever, and our parents never age. But as we take that trip around the sun a few more times, time begins to speed up. Our children age in rapid motion in front of our eyes, summers that once yawned in front of us pass by in a breath.

We get older faster, moments disappear more quickly, and the tick tock of the clock starts to feel like a relentless burden.

The great Yogi Berra was once asked “What time is it?” He responded with “...You mean... now?”

The present becomes the past so quickly that we don't notice it until the moments have started slipping by. Only by looking backwards can we put moments of love and loss, joy and pain,

into a context that gives them meaning which will guide us into the future.

Martin Buber, nineteenth-century Jewish philosopher, said that we can encounter God when we acknowledge the profound and unique humanity of another person, a moment he referred to as an I-Thou moment. A moment, just one second, when we are 100% present with another person, focused on them, their individuality, creates an I-Thou moment.

But, Buber said, these moments are fleeting. And as soon as you stop to say “Hey I think that was one of those I-Thou experiences....” POOF it’s gone. We can only recognize them in hindsight, and if we try to categorize and unpack while in the moment, the moment crumbles.

Judaism is a faith that sanctifies time. Days, months, seconds, moments. Ours is a faith that goes to great lengths to help us achieve and appreciate more I-Thou and more meaningful

moments. Our faith requires us to pause and reflect; to consider the magnitude and privilege afforded to us with each and every moment.

We don't just move into a new house and start unpacking. We stop and hang a mezuzah on the doorpost to remind everyone who enters that this is a Jewish home.

We don't just sit down and start studying Torah. We say a blessing thanking God for the ability to engage, to wrestle, to struggle with our tradition.

Big moments and little moments. All sanctified with blessings, moments of gratitude.

The shrill sound of the shofar, this holiday of Rosh Hashana, every Jewish ritual exists for the purpose of forcing us to stop and take notice of an important moment that might otherwise pass us by. We don't just eat the peace of bread, we join in a blessing of thanks as a community... then we eat.

A cosmic confluence of coincidence gave us an extra second in 5775, and many scientists and telescopes and lasers were used to quantify and measure it. That is a lot of work for one second, but was it worth it? It is up to each of us to determine the answer to that question. We each have a responsibility to make that extra second worth the effort of its creation. I have a feeling we could all reclaim a few more seconds of our lives and turn them into meaningful moments.

In 5776 how can we claim more meaningful seconds without the planets and stars aligning in just the right way? How can we make more meaning with our moments?

A friend of mine led a Birthright trip a while ago. Birthright is a free trip to Israel for young adults who have never been there before, if that's you come talk to me. Anyways... my friend Jeremy was leading this trip for a group of college students, and the only piece of technology he brought was a disposable film camera with 27 exposures on it. The participants on the trip were stunned, they didn't get it. "Why would you only want to take 27 pictures?" "Why would you want to wait to see

what the pictures look like?” “What do you mean ‘develop’ the pictures?”

But Jeremy had a goal in mind with this antiquated disposable film camera. Later on he told me “Having only 27 pictures makes me consider each moment, and decide if each one is worthy of a photograph. I found myself taking more pictures of people and less pictures of scenery. Even though the scenery was beautiful, it was the people who created all the memories.”

I’m going to try and pause more. To listen more. To be more patient. I’m going to try not to take my phone out when I’m waiting in line for anything longer than 12 seconds. Instead I’m going to try and notice the world around me. I’m going to say more blessings, and be mindful of small miracles. And I’m going to relish every little smile from my baby boy.

How are you going to fill the new year with more meaningful moments? How will you make each second of 5776 worth noticing, worth remembering, and worth experiencing?