

**Quantity Time**  
**Rabbi Ari Lucas**  
**Yom Kippur 5780**

**“You have to let the coffee grounds bloom.” This is what the barista said to me as she could see I was taking an interest in her craft. She was telling me how a good cup of pour over coffee allows the oils and aromas of the coffee bean to reach their full potential. “You pour a little boiling water over the freshly ground beans and then let them breathe, give them time to open up.” The method is slow and deliberate. It’s labor intensive, but it’s worth it. It’s certainly better than instant.**

**As I watched her slowly pour the water, I felt an urge to get going. I had a meeting back at the shul and if I was late for that, I’d be late to pick up the kids and then dinner would be delayed and then we’d get to bed late. The barista could sense I was getting impatient and she said, “you can’t rush a good cup of coffee.”**

**I appreciated her commitment. To her it was a spiritual discipline - an exercise in patience. And she got me thinking about what is worth our time. We are all so rushed and pulled in different directions, I marveled at her willingness to slow down and to slow me down.**

**There’s an irony in instant coffee. We created it because we’re busy and we need to have it in a pinch, but what we wind up with is bad coffee. Bad coffee we can live with (at least some of us can), but when it comes to the important things in life, like relationships or how we spend our energy - well that’s a different story. If we treat everything as instant, if we rush because we’re too busy to be fully present in our lives, then the quality of our relationships and our lives will suffer.**

**This Yom Kippur I invite you to reflect with me on how we’re spending our time. Are we using it wisely? Does it reflect our priorities of what is most important to us?**

**My father once wrote:**

**We all complain endlessly about time. We protest our inability to slow down its passage. As we grow older, birthdays are less and less occasions for honest celebration. Time feels more and more like a thief that surreptitiously steals our lives from us, day by day, year by year...Frustrated, then, we behave like unruly children resentful of not getting our way. We kill time. We waste time. Occasionally, we invest time - but rarely all that cleverly.**

**I first got thinking about this topic of how we spend our time when I read an op-ed by Frank Bruni in the New York Times, titled “Quantity Time.” Everyone talks about “quality time,” but he argues that quality time is a myth - you can’t schedule quality interactions or experiences. Rather you can create the conditions for quality by spending long stretches of quantity time with people who we care about. Bruni writes about an extended family vacation and what they experience makes possible. He says:**

**“With a more expansive stretch, there’s a better chance that I’ll be around at the precise, random moment when one of my nephews drops his guard and solicits my advice about something private. Or when one of my nieces will need someone other than her parents to tell her that she’s smart and beautiful. Or when one of my siblings will flash back on an incident from our childhood that makes us laugh uncontrollably, and suddenly the cozy, happy chain of our love is cinched that much tighter...**

**I know how my 80-year-old father feels about dying, religion and God not because I scheduled a discreet encounter to discuss all of that with him. I know because I happened to be in the passenger seat of his car when such thoughts were on his mind and when, for whatever unforeseeable reason, he felt comfortable articulating them.”**

**Bruni captures something important which is that in our emotional and relational lives, we don’t operate on demand. We can’t have deep conversations on cue, rather we need to give each other proper time and space to make it possible for those thoughts and feelings to surface. And the best way to make that happen is by spending quantity time with each other.**

**How do you spend your quantity time? There are all these ways now of tracking your time. Your iphone will tell you that in the last 7 days you’ve spent 2 hours and 13 minutes on social networking sites, a little over 5 hours on entertainment, a little under 2 hours on e-mail. The results are not pretty. But these tools are getting more sophisticated - they now have ways to set limits on the amount of time we use a certain app or prompt us to put it away.**

**My own children have started to tell me to put my phone away. I’m grateful to them for that. They’ll say, “that’s not important.” And I always say, “you’re right.” I’m going to try to spend more quantity time with them and less with my phone in the year to come.**

**How do you spend your quantity time?**

**Right now, you’re spending it with me, here in shul. Now you might think, I don’t have**

**much time, why am I spending a whole day of my life in synagogue! And I would say that Yom Kippur is a good use of your quantity time - it's essential to cultivating this awareness.**

**We have nowhere to be - you and I, no distractions, no other commitments. Yom Kippur is our annual chance to take an audit of our lives and ask if we're spending our days the way we want to.**

**Yom Kippur is a gift. It's a gift of quantity time. We're here all day - many of us with the people who matter most to us - family and community. Parts of Yom Kippur are downright boring. And that's the point. We don't promise you that you'll be entertained from the moment kol nidrei begins until the sounding of the shofar at neilah. Adarabbah - on the contrary - this service is long by design; it has highs and lows, peaks and valleys. Because we're not here to entertain you, we're here to facilitate your inner work to reflect on the significance of your choices. We create a space where you can engage with the liturgy, with your own thoughts, with big questions about your life and your purpose. How are you different here this year than you were at this same time last year? How do you wish to be different at this same time next year? We don't guarantee that at any moment you'll have some major "aha!" revelation about your life. But we create conditions and offer the quantity time that make that possible.**

**When the kohanim bless us. When the Torah is read. When the ark is opened for neilah. When you beat your chest. When we ask, "who shall live and who shall die?" When your defenses are down because you haven't eaten for a while. When you feel your dependence for everything in your life. There's nowhere else you need to be but right here, right now for the entirety of this long and laborious spiritual marathon. Maybe you'll hit your stride. Maybe you'll stumble at mile 14, but when we cross that finish line together, we hope, we believe that something has been transformed in the process.**

**This is sacred time. We bless "mekadesh yisrael v'haz'manim - the One who sanctifies Israel and time." "She-hehyanu v'kiyemanu lazman hazeh - thank you for keeping us in life, for sustaining us and enabling us to reach this special time in our lives."**

**But we also sense on Yom Kippur that our time is running out. We recite yizkor and remember those whose absence is palpable in our lives. We feel saddened that we don't have any more quantity time with them - even though we use the space of yizkor and kaddish to bring them back to us in spirit. And we're keenly aware of our own mortality. Yom Kippur is a reminder that our time is running out, but there's still time.**

**There's a powerful Yehuda Amichai Poem that is written as a conversation with the book of Ecclesiastes. You know the passage. It was in the Bible before the Byrds turned it into a beautiful song. "To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven - a time to be born a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted. But Amichai argues with the author of Ecclesiastes. He writes**

**"A person doesn't have time in his life to have time for everything.  
He doesn't have seasons enough to have a season for every purpose.  
Kohélet lo tzadak k'she-Amar kakh - Ecclesiastes was wrong when he said so.**

**A person needs to love and to hate at the same moment.  
To laugh and cry with the same eyes  
With the same hands to throw stones and gather them...**

**...**

**He will die as figs die in autumn. Shriveled and full of himself and sweet, the leaves growing dry on the ground, the bare branches pointing to the place where there's time for everything."**

**Amichai is troubled that we don't have enough time to do all the things we wish to in this world. That life is short and we are mortal. But to Amichai, I would offer this response from the Stoic philosopher Seneca who wrote:**

**"Life is long enough. And it's given in sufficient measure to do many great things if we spend it well. But when it's poured down the drain of luxury and neglect, when it's employed to no good end, we're finally driven to see that it has passed us by before we even recognize it passing. And so it is, " he concludes, "we don't receive a short life, we make it so."**

**To summarize, Amichai says - life's short. To which Seneca would respond, "Yes, but it's long enough if we spend it well."**

**We're losing our appreciation of the significance of time.**

**Time used to be told with hourglasses and as the grains fell through we had a sense that something was being lost with the passage of time. And then the analog clock gave us a sense of the sweeping arc of time - round and round we go as we cover the same ground over and over again. Time doubles back and repeats, sweeping us forward. And then with the digital age, we lost that sense of cyclical time, now it just marches forward forever or at least until the battery dies. There are no moving parts, just a signal from a satellite somewhere, or perhaps a cell phone tower. Digital time is cruel and unwise.**

**As Jews, we tell time by the sun and the moon. By the cosmic alignments. When the sun sets, it's a new day in the Jewish calendar, when we see stars, shabbat is over. When the sun rises again, it's time to praise the One who formed us. And as the moon waxes and wanes, we feel the breath of the universe inhaling and exhaling with us. A new moon with its darkness - gives space for other stars to shine, it is a chance for renewal, a full moon a chance for Gratitude and celebration. Constantly waxing and waning - like the tides washing up on shore time breathing with us.**

**The Jewish calendar can help us recapture that sense of the significance of time. We mark the changes of the seasons with holidays, and we mark the passage of years with high holy days. We pause for Shabbat and look up at the sky on Rosh Hodesh. These rhythms guide and shape our lives.**

**We need these constant reminders. In this age of instant gratification and constant distraction; in the age when everything is disposable and food is fast, where we crave more and more and are never filled. Where everything is made of plastic and you can't tell one variety of apple from another. We need to give the coffee time to breathe. We need to give ourselves time to breathe.**

**It's getting harder to come by quantity time. I remember when I worked in Washington, there was a secret list of vacation spots that didn't have cell phone service. The life of a Congressional staffer was glued to the Blackberry (back then it was Blackberries). Waiting for breaking news or e-mail updates. Knowing that we all lacked the self-control not to check our phones while on vacation, staffers would choose vacations spots intentionally in places without service so they could really disconnect.**

**But we don't always have the luxury to take a vacation to remind us of what's most important, so we need to cultivate strategies of how to be more mindful in our day to day - how not to give in to the constant temptation and distraction that technology imposes on our lives. There's a game that young people play where they put their phones in the middle of the table when they're out to dinner. The goal is not to check your phone. But if you do, the first person to do so has to pay for dinner for the entire table.**

**Even having the presence of the phone on the table is a distraction. It communicates to the people we're dining with that I'm with you, but at any moment, I could be pulled away. Can we give up our phones and be truly present with each other for the duration of a meal at a time, or at special occasions like a bar or bat mitzvah celebration? One person who wrote about his own struggles with technology changed his lock screen to read, "What for?"**

Why now? What else?” As if to force him to answer these questions before accessing his phone. What for - what do I need to access my phone for? Why now- is this really truly urgent or can it wait? I most appreciate “what else?” Every choice to opt in to technology is a simultaneous choice to opt out of something else.

There are a number of books out that address our current cultural predicament as it relates to time and productivity. (Not that I’ve read any of them - who has the time?) There’s actually an acronym on the Internet that’s become common - TLDR is very common on the internet. It stands for “Too long, didn’t read.” No one has quantity time or energy any more to read long complex ideas developed with nuance.

And not just with technology, but it’s spilling over. I took my kids to the zoo recently and I couldn’t take my eyes off the giraffes. I wanted to watch how their bodies move, how they support that massive neck. How they crane to eat a leaf. My children couldn’t wait to move on to the next thing or ride the train. And the throngs of people who pass by, “yeah big deal a giraffe, let’s see the next thing.”

One is called “Deep Work,” by Cal Newport, another is called “Mastery” by Robert Green, and a third is “Outliers” by Malcolm Gladwell. All three revolve around the theme that to get really good at something, it requires time and persistence - the ability to stick with something through failures and avoid distractions. The Gladwell rule is that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to get really good at something. You can’t rush a good cup of coffee, and you certainly can’t rush being an expert clarinetist.

Yom Kippur is our time to stop or at least slow down do our own “deep work.” We strive for mastery over our relationships with God and with each other. And if it requires 10,000 hours of persistence, then we’re putting in 25 hours here today.

The Mishnah says that the original pious ones *hayu shohim* they would sit and wait, they would meditate for a full hour before they began to pray. That’s commitment and discipline. Imagine arriving in synagogue for a full hour before services begin just to sit. It teaches that prayer isn’t something you can jump into and have a good session whenever you feel like it. You have to wait and ponder, prepare the landscape for something new to bloom. And often we’re met with disappointment and frustration.

There’s the old story about the hasid who davening at the Kotel day in and day out with intensity. He’s moving his body wildly, shuckling, and moaning to God, pounding the stones of the ancient temple. And after watching this man for some time an onlooker

**approaches him and asks him what it's like to pray with such intensity and fervor. And the man pauses from his prayer and says, "sometimes, it feels like I'm talking to a wall."**

**The point of that story is that the man is pious - not because he feels connected or gratified all the time. But rather because he persists even when he doesn't.**

**Rabbi Menahem Mendl of Kotzk who lived in Poland at the turn of the 19th century asks a question about the wording of the v'ahavta paragraph of the Sh'ma. Why, he wonders, does the Torah say that we should place these words "al levavekha- on your heart?" Shouldn't we strive to have the teachings of the Torah penetrate into our hearts. He teaches that most of the time our hearts are closed. So we can't get these words in. But while our hearts are closed, we can continue to place the words on our hearts as a discipline. Because there are moments in life when our hearts break open. And if we've done the work of placing the words on our hearts, day after day, when those moments of breaking occur, all the words and ideas of the Torah will flood in.**

**Most of the time our hearts are closed. Tuesday morning in rush hour. Weeknight family dinner, or watching TV on the couch. The grind. But then there are moments when hearts break open - a sunset, the birth of a child or grandchild, the death of a loved one, or even catching a glimpse of people who we see every day in a way that really allows us to see them. Then, having put in the work, we are better prepared to catch the holiness and significance of the moment.**

**The most important things in our lives require quantity time and constant tending - persistence through challenges and boredom. They require a combination of deep work and patience.**

**Allow me to share a couple snapshots, anecdotes, and invitations about when and how this concept of quantity time plays out in community.**

- 1) A friend of mine has been struggling with chronic illness He has spent stretches of time in the hospital and has to go for long outpatient treatments. In a note of gratitude he sent to friends and family, he reflected on how the illness made him feel isolated, but the moments that sustained him through the year are the moments of connection - when people would take time out of their day to call, or send a text, or knowing that he was going to be in treatment, share things that he could do to pass that time. Often we can't take away someone's illness, but we can take away some of the loneliness that accompanies illness by spending quantity time with people who**

are suffering. It's not entertaining or easy to spend time with someone in a hospital, but it's holy and important quantity time.

- 2) I invite you to spend more quantity time here in shul and with community. Come on Shabbat, show up for shiva. Shiva is a great example of quantity time. When we experience a loss, the tradition offers us time. Time to sit, time to reflect, time to pray, time to be comforted by guests. I pray that you don't experience loss this year, but if you do, give yourself the blessing of quantity time to grieve. And then mark your calendar for yahrtzeits and yizkors to spend time with your loved ones whose physical presence we miss, but whose light and legacy continue to guide our lives.
- 3) Come for sukkot next week, it's going to be wonderful. Or maybe it won't, but come anyway. But when you come for Shabbat or Sukkot, don't just come once and try it, you have to be prepared to stick with it. It might not be meaningful in the first time or the fifth time, but over time, I guarantee it will change your life. I like to tell bar and bat mitzvah students who are struggling to learn how to put on tefillin, "It's only awkward the first 100 times you do it." The lesson is, quantity time leads to quality experiences.

To have meaningful relationships, or friendships or family relationships - it requires persistence through struggle, but also the permission and patience to be bored without reaching for something else to entertain or distract us. In this year, let us give our time and attention to the people who matter most to us and the pursuits that make life meaningful. To take a vacation without an overpacked agenda and see what comes up. To go for a walk around the neighborhood and see what we notice. It might be boring. It's entirely possible, in fact likely, that nothing amazing will happen. But it's also possible that something will. And you won't know until you give yourself the time and opportunity to experience it.

May this be a year in which we treat our quantity time - however much we have - as a gift. And use it wisely.

G'mar hatima tovah.