

Main idea:

Time is a commodity. One we think we have too much or not enough of. How do we make it holy and use it in a meaningful way?

Have you noticed that time has changed since the pandemic started? The hours drag by and yet I keep running out of time to finish my to-do list. In fact the truth is our society is obsessed with time.

Every day, we are either passing time, wasting time or killing time. We pass time as we wait in our doctor's office for an appointment or in a theatre for a movie to start. We waste time by mindlessly surfing the web or by playing an addictive video game. And, we kill time when we have half an hour between appointments.

When we are waiting for something we might say it will come "In good time" and if you're doing something you want to get right you should "take your time." Someone might show up right on time or if they're late we might say to them, "It's about time." If you're wrapped up in something you might lose track of time and when facing a deadline you might be "out of time." I could go on with more examples, but I don't have enough time.

Pause til laughter stops.

While we think of time as a constant, always passing at the same pace, second after second, minute after minute, hour after hour, in reality, time is subjective. Our situation dictates how quickly or slowly time passes. I remember complaining about a baseball game being too short and my dad, getting right to the issue, saying, "I wouldn't want to hang that long." A minute can seem like a blink, or, an eternity depending on whether you are playing a game or being hurt.

For me, the Jewish holidays are like this. All summer long, people comment over and over about how soon the holidays will be here. This year especially, there was so much to do I knew it was going to be hard to be ready and wished I had more time to prepare. But, now that they are here, the Holy days go by so quickly. Rosh Hashanah will be over in a few hours and Yom Kippur is right around the corner. Now, if we only had more time to prepare for Sukkot.

Pause.

Mitch Albom, in his book, *The Time Keeper*, shares that we, as humans, are the only creatures who measure time. He writes, "Try to imagine a life without timekeeping. You probably can't. You know the month, the year, the day of the week. There is a clock on your wall or the dashboard of your car or on your wrist. You have a schedule, a calendar, a time for dinner or a movie. Yet all around you, timekeeping is ignored. Birds are not late. A dog does not check its watch. Deer do not fret over passing birthdays. People alone measure time. People alone chime the hour. And, because of this, people alone suffer a paralyzing fear that no other creature endures. A fear of time running out." (page 8)

How long can we go without some timepiece pacing us? Clocks are plastered on bank signs, ovens and microwaves as well as, watches, clocks, cell phones and computers. Think of how many clocks you see just in your house. We see that time it is, everywhere.

It is now no longer good enough for us to know the time, we must know the "correct" time. No one trusts the clock on the wall.

Everyone pulls out their phones and wants to use the "real" time for starting an event. Not a moment before and not a moment after. It is no longer possible for us to say, "I'm not late, your watch must be fast." Time has been standardized and has even more control over our lives than ever before.

In a book called *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything*, James Gleick, discusses what he calls "hurry sickness." This is the desire for us to speed up the pace of everything in our lives. He points to the modern conveniences of microwaves and speed dial. He even makes note of the "close door" button on an elevator. How many of us push that button thinking our seconds are so precious they need to be saved? Does that button really do anything? Even if it makes the doors close faster than they would have, how much time are you really adding to your day?

A study conducted by researchers at the School of Psychology at the Liverpool John Moores University in Liverpool, England, found that during the pandemic only 19% of the people felt that, in comparison to normal, during the pandemic it felt like time was passing at a similar rate. This 19% is in contrast to the 40% who felt like it was passing slower and 40% who felt that it was passing quicker.

This desire to get more accomplished, adds to the question, what can we do to control time. The simple and short answer is nothing.

PAUSE

But, Judaism has another answer. Judaism responds to this dilemma by sanctifying time. The root of the word *Kadosh* or holy, means set aside. Something is holy when it is separated (demarcated) from the mundane. So, how can time be marked when it isn't physical?

Rituals are a major way for us to slow down time. When we sit down to eat, instead of just rushing into the meal we stop, pause for a moment and recite a blessing - in doing this, we take time to express gratitude for the food we will be eating and to reflect on the source of the food. Blessings allow us to raise up ordinary moments by giving them our attention.

On the other side of the spectrum, lifecycle moments get us to pause and grasp the awesomeness of big events.

The birth of a child does make things more hectic but the celebration of a *Bris* for a boy or *Brit Bat*, a baby naming for a girl, gives the parents a way to slow the overwhelming cycle of laundry, diaper changes and feedings and appreciate the miracle of birth. When we elevate a private event into a communal celebration, we create a holy moment. We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to welcome this child into the covenant. Whether it is the birth of a child, the celebration of a *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*, a wedding or a funeral, there are always moments for reflection in the celebration and observation of the life cycle.

In ancient times, people, while living a less rushed life than we do today, also had responsibilities that made it difficult to appreciate the time they had.

All of our major scholars had other professions as well. The Talmudic commentator Rashi was a vintner, growing grapes and making wine while others were farmers, Rebbe Yehoshuah was a blacksmith. Others were farmers, tanners, shoemakers, merchants and more.

These rabbis, and those living in the time of the Temple, were not living a solely spiritual life. They worked long hours and to respond to this, created a system that gave meaning to time. They made holy moments. The ebbs and flows of our religious calendar provided those living at these times with the chance to make time special.

Specifically, they developed a system of pilgrimage holidays where people left their farms and businesses to bring offerings to the Temple in Jerusalem. The time that they spent on this journey was of supreme importance to them. It brought the Jewish community together and helped them foster a closer relationship with God by traveling to the Temple. It also created a sense of responsibility.

It is not surprising that in addition to the commonly known names of Pesach, Sukkot and Shavuot, each of our holidays is given a special name in the liturgy that includes the Hebrew word for time. Passover is known as Zman Cheruteinu, the time of our freedom. Sukkot is also called Zman Simchateynu, the time of our rejoicing, as we are commanded in the Torah to be happy on Sukkot and Shavuot is commonly referred to as Zman Mattan Torateinu, the time of the giving of the Torah.

Each holiday is an oasis of time where we stop our regular behaviors in order to focus our attention on a specific theme.

In addition to the cyclical holidays that we pass through each year, we have a special day set aside each week to be conscious of how we use our time. Shabbat is a remarkable asset to the soul with the attention it calls to how we spend our time in a much different way than during the rest of the week. One way to intensify the opportunity Shabbat provides is to unplug and reboot. Just as we fast from food on Yom Kippur we can hold an electronics fast each and every Shabbat. We can set aside the technology that keeps us racing against time.

It is particularly important to find a way to make time sacred when there is so much overlap between our secular and spiritual spaces. For many these days, the space where you are celebrating the holidays is the same space where you regularly watch tv or conduct business.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel in his book *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* states, "The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from

the results of creation to the mystery of creation, from the world of creation to the creation of the world."

The first time in the Torah that the word Holy is used is in reference to Shabbat. We read that at the end of the week of creation , Va'yivarech Elohim et Yom Hashvi'i Va'yikadesh oto ki vo shavat mikol m'lachto asher barah Elohim la'asot" "And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all work of creation that he had done."

What do we do each week when we recite the Kiddush?

We, again and again, sanctify time, we make time holy. Time, which the rest of the week dictates what we do when, time which we are constantly trying to conquer, on Shabbat is made holy.

Rabbi Janet Marder gives us insight into the way we become holy through our observance of the High Holidays. She states: Perhaps our ancestors devised these long and drawn-out days, with their deliberate tempo and enforced repetition, because they intuited an important fact: some things, to be done well, have to be done slowly. Character development, which is at the heart of the holidays, can't be hurried. You can't grab it on the run. You can't do it in your sleep. You can't do it for ten minutes a day while you're watching television or speed-read it while you're working out on the stationary bike. Character development is the fruit of time."

When we are assessing how we can change and be better people in the future, we can not rush the outcome we are looking for.

In the midst of this day of reflection and internal growth we have the liturgy of Unetanetokef. We ask, who shall live and who shall die. We reflect on the idea that we don't have an infinite amount of time. For all of us, there will be a moment when we have no more time.

We can't control time. We can't speed it up or slow it down but we can decide how we spend the time we have and we can choose to make it holy.

Gmar Chatima Tovah