

Rabbi Noah Arnow  
Kol Rinah  
Shabbat Chol HaMoed Sukkot  
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### Ecclesiastes 3

- 1 To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heaven:
- 2 a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
- 3 a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
- 4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
- 5 a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
- 6 a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
- 7 a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
- 8 a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

For everything there is a time. A time for seeking and a time for losing. The question is, is there really ever a time for losing? The Hebrew is *עת לאבד*, which means, literally, to lose something, and not to be able to find it.

What could it mean for there to be a time for losing something? I'll give three possibilities, each different. First, it could mean that there are occasions when we are actually lucky to lose something—when losing something is beneficial to us. Second, we can understand the verb, as some do, as a time for giving up when something is lost. And third, there are times in our lives when, like it or not, we are more inclined to lose things.

So first, when can it be good to lose something? When could it be fortuitous to lose something? When, in the search, you find something better. We say that life is what happens while you're making plans. Life, perhaps, is what happens when we're looking for what we've lost.

For a biblical example, let me tell just a bit of a story that we don't read much. It's about the first king of Israel, Saul, before he became king. First, some background. The people have been asking Samuel, the prophet, to appoint a king, and when God tells Samuel, "Heed their demands and appoint a king for them," (1 Samuel 8:22), Samuel it seems, concedes.

Then, Saul, the most handsome and tall Israelite, goes looking for the donkeys of his father, which had gone astray. They went everywhere, throughout the entire territory of the tribe of Benjamin, but didn't find them. Saul is ready to give up, but his servant says that

there's a man of God in the next town over and that maybe he can tell them something. That man of God, is, of course, Samuel, and when Samuel sees Saul, God tells Samuel this is the one who will be king. Samuel tells Saul not to worry about the donkeys, that they'd been found, and eventually, Saul is appointed king.

Saul sets out to look for lost donkeys, but instead finds the kingship. What experiences, objects or relationships have you found while looking for something else?

Oftentimes, by the way, when we are searching for lost objects, we find other things we didn't even know we lost, like when we look behind the couch, or underneath car seats. The process of searching is one of being more attentive, of looking, and of appreciating and missing something lost.

Another way of understanding the phrase is that there's a time for giving up when something is lost, for despairing of a lost object. This is a critical moment in Jewish law. When I find an object that someone else has clearly lost, I have to try to identify the owner and try to return the object. But that's only if I can reasonably assume that the owner has not despaired of ever finding the item again. There's a time when we have to give up looking for something, say that it's just lost, and never coming back.

Sometimes, we lose things that matter, but don't matter that much. When I was I was living in New York City, my parents got me some beautiful clothing for my birthday, a couple of shirts, a sweater, I think, and I took them home with me on the subway, and left them on the subway. Never saw them again. I clearly still remember, but I've gotten over it.

But I'm sure we can all think of things objects that we've lost that have meant something to us. And there are so many other losses we've experienced, of relationships, of innocence, financial losses, jobs, that we must learn how to live with. There times when we must learn to cope with a loss, to accept a loss, to learn to live with a loss, and know that we're never getting that exact thing or situation or relationship or feeling or mindset back. It'll never be the same again. There are times for not giving up, for not accepting a loss, when it may not be permanent or when it's very fresh. But a time for losing can be a time for letting go.

A third meaning of a time for losing is literal: that there are times in our lives when we are more inclined to lose things, for good or bad. Kids, or at least some of my kids, some of the time, are terrific at losing things. A shoe in the living room and not by the shoe rack by the door is as good as lost forever, or at least until a hurried parent tells the child to look there. Part of growing up means becoming more responsible for our belongings.

And, as we unfortunately know, losing things can be a sign of mental and neurological impairment, early signs of Alzheimer's Disease or dementia, which begins with losing objects, and can, tragically, end in the loss of our very selves. Losing can be so hard.

On Sukkot, in a certain sense, we "lose" our homes, or at least abandon them, to take up temporary residence in our sukkot. That loss of our permanent, safe dwelling, at least for me, makes me miss and appreciate it quite a bit. The experience of losing something temporarily can create such a powerful sense of gratitude upon return to the status quo.

Amidst the inevitable times of losing, may we also be blessed with finding—with finding good things, with finding hope, with finding gratitude.

Because, For everything, there is a time.