

The Value of Time

Rosh Hashanah

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Congregation

Renaissance on Peachtree

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As you all know, according to the Hebrew calendar, This is Rosh Hashanah, the 1<sup>st</sup> of Tishrei, for the new year 5771, and in ten days we begin our observance of Yom Kippur.

Every time someone mentions the High Holidays, someone else usually responds with reference to the season: 'oh my, they really snuck up on me this year, they are so early, I did not have time to properly prepare,' or maybe next year they will be late, when in reality they are, according to the Hebrew calendar, right on time.

I remember while growing up, our family always wanted the holidays come late every year. The most obvious reason my parents and their friends looked forward to the holidays arriving later, most likely had something to do with living in Augusta, Georgia, and belonging to a non-air conditioned Shul, with the shared optimism and misconception that a few weeks later in the fall would really make a difference and give relief from the uncomfortably warm 90 degree temperatures.

I am reminded at this time of year, that while we read in the Torah that just as there were geographical cities of refuge as a location for those innocent of high crimes, as a place to reside and be offered protection, there is also, what one would call, a place of refuge, in time. This haven in time is the past month of Elul, that was just concluded, last night. This place of refuge in time, is where, we as Jews have the opportunity to take shelter each year to rectify our own personal spiritual ills and dwell upon what we will ask for in forgiveness during the observance of Yom Kippur.

Our rabbis also tell us that this past month of Elul is also considered a gentle month. As the last month of the year, Elul has become a time for review and personal inventory for the closing year, as well as a time of preparation for the coming year, as we consider the three pillars upon which the world stands—Torah, service of God, and act of kindness, by increasing in study, prayer, and charity.

As I think back over this past month of Elul, I also think of how much the every day calendar affects each of our lives.

Not only do we get invitations to events months much earlier than in the past, it has also become the custom to receive something that is relatively new, a postcard informing us to, save the date, for some upcoming event. This advance notice is informing us that we will be receiving an invitation to some special event, such as a wedding, some months away.

This early notification even extends to many congregations, so as to provide the respective families of Bar and Bat Mitzvah dates, over three years ahead of the scheduled date.

I suppose the purpose of this advance, invitation to an invitation, is to allow the soon to be invited guests, to begin planning the trip, determine what clothes to wear, and of course, even consider the type of present that needs to be purchased.

Not only does the calendar seem to affect our daily lives, but even other events tend to make us count the days or even minutes. In Atlanta, we are used to thinking how long it will take to get somewhere depending on if it is during rush hour or the middle of the day, so we might save a few minutes. Cooking recipes now list not only the cooking time, but the preparation time as well. And don't even suggest using a crock-pot that simmers several hours, versus the alternative of a microwave, where we have now advanced from saving minutes, to counting the seconds.

While we tell others and ourselves that we like to save time, I really wonder, how do we actually save time? What type of ledger do we use to insure our correctness on the amount of time saved. Do we place it into a passbook like we used for banks, or list the time saved on our computer, or perhaps simply scribbled on a misplaced list we stored in in a desk drawer.

Maybe, if we become extremely skilled in saving time, we will need to have others keep our tally for us, by telling someone we saved so much time today by using the express lane at the grocery store, and using the expressway instead of city streets and saved even more time. Instead of using a coffee percolator or stove top kettle, you can utilize a microwave oven to make instant coffee, and now we are up to saving additional seconds from the day. Ultimately, we have the problem in determining how do we actually redeem, or spend these extra moments that seemed so very precious to us while we were in the process of saving them.

Why? Why not simply enjoy the moment instead of feeling like we have to bank these minutes and yes, even seconds that were saved. I sincerely do not believe that our lives are like the advertisement for a cell phone where you transfer unused minutes from this month onto next month. If only it were true.

Apparently, saving time seems to be more meaningful and important then figuring ways to spend the moments we saved.

When did saving time become almost an obsession? How many times have we said,

“ I don't know where the time went.”

Yes, I know there are many examples when time is a necessary factor. You want a quick response when calling 911 for assistance, either for police protection or requesting an ambulance. The military would measure time in minutes and seconds if needed to send missiles as defense against enemy attack.

But when you have completed reading a good novel, seeing a great movie, or completed a vacation cruise, you may remark that you wished it had not ended so soon.

Do we allow time and the calendar to control us, or are we in control of our own time. How often do we say, I need to make time, so I can accomplish and do such and so. I would imagine it would be as difficult for us to make time as it would be for us to save time. And yet, and yet, we say these phrases as though it were true, allowing time and the calendar to control us, instead of the other way around.

What would you have done with the minutes saved by condensing the time you enjoyed from watching the movie 'Gone with the wind,' and what parts would you have cut, to save and store even more time. Are we really saving time to more fully enjoy those events that do take longer, fully relish their enjoyment, and deeper meaning, or simply to use time more efficiently?

Consider how to best take each each day as a blessing to live our lives to the fullest, and not be too concerned with saving time for the future. Instead of waiting for the future to become the present, let us now live our lives each day,

and wake up each morning without planing on how to save time for the future, so as to fully live in the moment.

At this New Year, Rosh Hashanah 5771, as we plan for the new year, it is also normal to look back over the past year of our personal trials and tribulations. If we think back of family members that were ill, business or financial reverses, and family dynamics, even if we find it difficult to do so, let us also think of a future with positive and beneficial thoughts.

Over the years, many prophets have widely proclaimed, the greatest gift we have, the Torah, is timeless.

Our teachers tell us that we should use the Torah as a road map, a GPS for directions to lead us through our wonderful journey of life. But perhaps the Torah isn't only a road map, but should also be the destination as well.

Remember, the Torah gave us the Sabbath, so that no matter how hectic and difficult our past week may have been, we always have the Sabbath to look forward to as a day to honor with peace, joy, and gentleness, a day for us to use as our own, personal, time out.

Unlike the gentle month of Elul, that comes only once a year, we should remember on this Rosh Hashanah, this New Year, that the Torah gave us the Sabbath for our personal benefit each week; to have and to use this as a day of reflection and comfort to do with as we see best to use for ourselves, and during the week, no matter what difficulties may arise, remember that Shabbat is always only a few days away.

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