

THE GIFT OF TIME

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Six days you can work, but the seventh day must be holy to you, a sabbath of strict rest to God.
(Shemos 35:2)

The time just flies by. On one hand, it is hard to believe that we have already reached the end of Sefer Shemos, again. On the other hand, it seems like we started it ages ago. Where has all the time gone to?

Timing is important as well. Two weeks ago, my family and I were on our way to spend Shabbos in Beit Shemesh, scheduled to take a taxi there at 3 pm on Friday afternoon. My son complained to me that we were leaving too early, but I explained that, when it comes to Erev Shabbos on the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem highway, the later you wait, the more risky it becomes. It is a long highway with few turn offs and alternative routes. It has happened on a few occasions when an accident has occurred on the highway that has blocked traffic for so long that religious drivers, on their way home, were forced to pull over and park their cars on the side of the highway for Shabbos, and walk to the closest community to spend it there. Telzstone has often been that closest community, receiving some very distraught last minutes guests.

It also happened to be a stormy Erev Shabbos as well, a deadly combination when you factor in drivers in a hurry to get home for Shabbos. I'm one of those people who like to be early and safe, rather than late and imperiled, but not everyone thinks the same way, and this makes for some very precarious driving.

Unfortunately, this ended up being the case that Friday as well, because a van crashed into a small car, causing a fatal accident, R"L. We didn't know this yet at the time, as we waited for our taxi and tried to track him down. Fifteen minutes passed, 30 minutes passed, and still no taxi. Finally, at 4 pm he told us that he was close, but stuck on the highway, because the police had completely shut down both sides of the highway.

By 4:25, we began making plans to stay home, even though we really didn't have much to use for Shabbos. We resigned ourselves to the fact that all that preparation to leave had been for naught, and had been considering our options, which had not been many when the phone rang again. Apparently, they had just cleared the traffic, and our driver wanted to know if we still wanted to go. It was 4:30, a 25 minute drive to where we had to go, and 5:12 pm was candle-lighting.

By 4:35 we were in the taxi and on our way, and thank God, the highway was perfectly clear the

entire way. We arrived in Beit Shemesh at about 5:10, and everything worked out fine, thank God. We even made dovening on time, and the rest of Shabbos was wonderful, except that I couldn't help feel bad for the family of the person who had been killed right before Shabbos, and all those who had been injured.

As always, with situations like that, there were lessons to learn. However, my son had to admit to the wisdom of leaving early, and how easily situations can turn around and become problematic when just five minutes ago, everything was fine. In fact, if we had left the house even just 15 minutes earlier, as I had wanted to, we would have missed the entire traffic jam, because my nephew, who had come from Jerusalem by bus around that time, had just missed the entire episode.

Time is an indomitable factor in Jewish life, much more so than in gentile life. Time runs out for everyone, eventually, but it seems to be more forgiving in the non-Jewish world than in the Jewish world. Should a gentile not be ready to eat by nightfall on a Friday night, he simply keeps preparing and eats later. This might aggravate some of his dinner guests, but they'll get over it, and he'll survive.

However, if a Jew keeps preparing past the entrance of Shabbos, he gets excision, and if we were warned by two witnesses who subsequently saw him break Shabbos, then he gets stoning to death. He may only cook for 30 seconds after nightfall, but that is enough for the Bais Din to give him capital punishment.

Indeed, there are many occasions when timing is a matter of life and death, either physically, or spiritually. Eat chometz a few seconds too late before Pesach, or a few seconds too early after Pesach, and that means being cut off from the Jewish people. Yes, it literally comes down to seconds during the Jewish year, and all through Jewish life, for that matter.

This was one of the very first lessons the Jewish people learned on the way out of Mitzrayim, and this week's special parshah, Parashas HaChodesh, and this week's parshios, represent a confluence of two separate sources speaking about a single concept. And, in true Purim fashion, which we have just left on our way to the freedom of Pesach, we will see that, contrary to popular thought, it is our very obedience to the rules of Jewish time that actually free us from this world.

For instance, there is the idea of Shabbos, with which Parashas Vayakhel begins. If one keeps it, by ceasing to perform specific creative activities from sundown on Friday afternoon until nightfall Motzei Shabbos the next day, then he is able to enjoy the timelessness of Shabbos day. However, if he does not distinguish between the six profane days of the week, and the holiness of Shabbos, then he remains trapped within time which can only be, at best, the weekend.

About 20 years ago, a study was performed, and reported in the Globe and Mail (Toronto), to see the effects of the weekend in different cultures. According to the study, of all the people surveyed, Orthodox Jews had the lowest blood pressure after the weekend, even though they only rested for one day, and even "consumed a very fatty and overcooked food during that time," which we call

"cholent." The least rested group: those who enjoyed the two-day weekend by simply having a blast.

The report said that the results were surprising, and after analysis, suggested that the difference may be the way Orthodox Jews abstain from being involved in the physical world, like the rest of the six days of the week, for the one day. It even recommended that other cultures try the same approach to the weekend, if they wanted to be able to reduce the stress in their lives!

Pekudai is the recounting of the contributions made to the Mishkan, and all that was produced as part of its construction. The Mishkan ran by the Jewish clock, especially since two of the main sacrifices offered there were the Tamid, the Continual Offering, two identical, ongoing sacrifices that had time limits by which they could be offered. As a result, they represented the continuity of time and of the Jewish people.

Then, of course, there is Parashas HaChodesh, the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people in Egypt, the mitzvah to sanctify the new moon each month. The gentile world also has a monthly calendar, but it is really a solar calendar divided up into 12 months, unlike the Jewish monthly calendar, which happens to have 12 months which add up to a year (except in a leap year, when an entire extra month is added, without which Pesach could end up, eventually, in the winter). What is the practical difference between the two approaches?

The difference is the moon itself.

I happen to doven at Neitz—sunrise—each morning. As a result, when I go to shul, it is still dark outside, as in night dark, and therefore usually, the moon is still out, and still quite bright, up in the sky, which where I live, is quite large. Hence, as tired as I may be at that time, and as confused about the day of the month I might be at that moment, the second I see the moon in that sky, and its present size at that point in its orbit, I am immediately reminded of what part of the month we are presently holding. At a moment's notice, I am able to find my place within the Jewish year. This is why the first mitzvah taught to the Jewish people in Egypt was Kiddush HaChodesh, the sanctification of the new moon. It was not just by the way. Believe it or not, it was the key to leaving Mitzrayim itself, which represented the opposite concept, as embodied in the golden calf. For, as any jeweler will tell you, gold represents eternity, and as a Kabbalist will tell you, a calf, a symbol of Egypt, represents unbridled youth. Therefore, Mitzrayim represented the human desire to be eternally youthful and responsible only to oneself.

Kiddush HaChodesh, which ties the Jew to time, is one of the ways that God says, "Take responsibility for yourself, be responsible to Me, and together we can use time to rectify Creation, and you can rise above its physical limitations. By using time meaningfully, you will harness its ability to bring out of you power that you never knew you had."

The Hebrew word says it all: zman. When three men or more say Birchas HaMazon together after a meal, they make a zimun, which means "invitation." The Hebrew word for money is mezuman, because it is ready to be used immediately. Hence, the word for time really refers to a state of

readiness, that is, a readiness for the opportunity that a moment in life might just happen to bring, so that it can be used meaningfully, and not lost forever.

Believe me, if money were to fall from the sky between 2 and 3 pm today, you'd be there with a large basket ready to catch as much as possible. So, why not act the same way with moments in life? Which brings us to the meaning of matzah. Ever see it being made? A frantic experience, no? A team of professional matzah bakers work furiously and very quickly to make sure that the dough does not become chometz, a symbol of squandered moments of life. Chometz is a kosher opportunity gone wrong, because too much time was taken to perform the mitzvah.

Indeed, contrary to popular belief, we don't eat matzah on Pesach because the Jewish people did not have time to bake break when leaving Egypt; that would only have taken 18 minutes, and they certainly had that much time before leaving. Rather, circumstances were created to make sure that they did not bake chometz, so that matzah would result, so that the Jewish people leaving Egypt, and all their descendants, could learn one of the most valuable lessons of life: how to meaningfully manage time.

Ironically, the modern business world has become one of the best examples of this idea (and for me personally, my own father, whose management of time I have always admired). How much money is spent just to find better ways to manage and keep track of time, so that it can be well used? The average CEO is a maven of mavens when it comes to using his time, which is why he is able to accomplish so much in so little time ... when it comes to making money.

My Rosh HaYeshivah, Rabbi Noach Weinberg, zt"l, who passed away about a month ago did many amazing things in his lifetime, because he did the most amazing thing by pursuing Torah like others pursue money, not an easy thing to do. For, the drawing power of the latter is its promise of wealth and power, which the body craves, and the former promises closeness to God in the World-to-Come, which the body doesn't even relate to.

At the R"Y's levayah, of the many praises mentioned, one stands out in my mind the most, and that is the way the R"Y, while still young, used to keep an actual record of how he spent every five minutes, all day long, every day, to make sure that it had not been wasted. He fulfilled, perfectly, the words of the wisest man, who said:

If you want it like money and seek it like buried treasures, then you will understand fear of God and Da'as Elokim you will find. (Mishlei 2:4-5)

For years I watched the Rosh HaYeshivah come and go as he traveled the world to fundraise so that he could spawn a movement that has affected hundreds of thousands of Jews, and brought so many of them back to Torah. Yet, I rarely ever saw the R"Y in state of exhaustion, or set back, though there were so many reasons why he could have been.

I particularly remember the Yemai Norayim, that special time of year when the R"Y joined us for

dovening, when he would stand at the front of the Bais Midrash, swaying the entire time as if his entire life was spent just pursuing God, which it was, and doing His will. When he snapped his fingers during the quiet of the Shemonah Esrai, it was no distraction. Rather, as it brought the R"Y new life to give to God, it woke the rest of us up as well, allowing us to feed off the energy that seemed to flow from the R"Y the entire time.

However, the R"Y was human like the rest of us, and the cancer that ravaged his body took a great toll on his physical presence. However, I overheard, it did not take a toll on the R"Y's spirit. From what I understand, the R"Y was in command until the very end, and most important of all, he was b'simchah until the last moment.

Classic Rav Noach Weinberg, zt"l.

Perfect freedom.

Use time to your spiritual advantage, and it will free from physical limitation.

Text

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