



Maximizing Our Time

Why did Hashem make days, months, years, seasons, and the like? Why couldn't we have one long continuum, without being bound by different seasons or times?

We see a common theme whenever we observe beginnings. The first mitzva is (Shemos 12:2) החודש הזה לכם Rosh Chodesh (time). Shulchan Aruch starts with יתגבר כארי, one should rise like a lion, as he shouldn't waste his time sleeping. The Gemara learns from Avraham, the first of the Avos, זריזין (Pesachim 4a). When we were taken from Mitzrayim it was done בחיפזון, in haste, zerizus. This is to tell us about the importance of time. The minhag is to give a gold watch to a chosson—alluding to the fact that time is golden. We must internalize that time doesn't come back, as we see from dates. To illustrate: the date January 1, 2012, comes only once—it is never duplicated.

The Klausenberger Rebbe preferred a wristwatch over a pocket watch because of the time wasted in removing a pocket watch and then returning it to its place. They say that in Kelm they would have a five-minute Seder, in order to instill the importance of five minutes. The Chassam Sofer said that he became who he was in five minutes—those random five minutes he found at various times throughout his days.

The Chofetz Chaim was adamant about wearing shoes without laces. He calculated that shoes with laces take an extra minute, since they require tying. Saving one minute a day adds up to approximately 360 minutes or six hours a year. In a lifetime that comes out to 420 hours! The Chofetz Chaim wasn't willing to forfeit 420 hours of his life on something so unproductive.

R' Yisrael Salanter was once asked by someone what he should learn if he had only five minutes each day to learn. He responded, "Learn five minutes of mussar, because then you'll see that you really have a lot more

time."

The pasuk states, למנות ימינו כן הודע...חכמה (Tehillim 90:12), teach us to count our days, then we shall acquire a heart of wisdom. Dovid Hamelech tells us that the years of our life are 70—ימי שנותינו בהם שבעים שנה, the days of our years are 70 (Tehillim 90:10). כן has a gematria of 70. The purpose of those 70 years is ונביא לבב חכמה, to bring the wisdom of Torah (חכמה) into our life. This explains ובני יששכר (Divrei HaYamim I, 12:33), the children of Yissaschar are men of understanding for the times—because they learn Torah.

One can possess many coins but when converted into bills, we notice a much smaller number, making it appear to be much less than it originally was. Likewise, one may have many seconds and minutes to his life, but his life span is only 70 years. For this reason Hashem made different seasons, days, nights, and so on. One should say to himself at the end of each day, "Another day has gone by. What did I accomplish?" The same applies to months, years, and seasons. As the saying goes, "Fear not death, but rather un-lived life."

At the age of 20, one becomes בר עונשין, held accountable for his sins (See Bamidbar, 16:27, Rashi). It is written ימי שנותינו בהם שבעים שנה. Each of us has a Yovel in our personal life. Adding 50 (Yovel) to 20 (בר עונשין), we get 70. We should count our days in order to make the days of our life count. This is the meaning in (Vayikra 25:8) וספרת (See Maharsha in Moed Katan, 28a), count the years of Yovel of our life. Just as slaves and land are set free by Yovel, similarly the neshama is freed from the body after one has his Yovel. When one dies, his neshama leaves him. וספרת is also related to ספיר, illuminate, as one should refine and purify himself during his lifetime.

We have different words to refer to time: זימון, to prepare, עת, זמן, is related to זמן, because our time in this world is given for us to make use of it, to prepare us for the next

world. As the Mishna guides us, להתקן עצמך, prepare yourself in the lobby so that you may enter the banquet hall (Avos 4:21). Time is so fleeting that every moment is immediately gone as it feeds into the next second. This is in order for us to realize that the only thing we have from our time is what we do with it. "Today will never happen again, but one good deed can make it last forever." The word שעה is rooted in שוע, to turn, move, as it says, ואל מנחתו לא שעה, Hashem didn't turn to Kayin's korban (Breishis 4:5), since time is moving, fleeting. The term עת is sourced in עתה, now, the present as we should make the most of the present. There is an expression that "We make our future by the best use of our present." The Ibn Ezra once wrote, העבר אין, the past is nothing, the present is like the blink of an eye, the future is still not yet, so why worry?

It states ואברהם זקן בא בימים (Breishis 24:1), Avraham was old. The Sefas Emes (Chayei Sara, 5652, s.v. במדרש) explains that Avraham came with his days—he utilized every moment of his life. This is what we say in Shemoneh Esrei—אל תשיבנו, don't return us to you empty—rather we should utilize our time properly. A way to awaken us to utilize our time properly is to remember the day of our birth and death, and as the Mishnah (Avos 3:1) instructs, דע מאין באת ולאן, know where you came from and where you will go. When one realizes that his time is limited, he may attempt to make the most of it. This is how we can define by בימים זקן בא בימים, as ואברהם זקן בא בימים is a contraction of ב' ימים, two days, referring to these two specific days.

Let us conclude with the following saying: "We don't have time to do everything but we do have time to do the important things. Don't do the trivial many, but rather do the important few".

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