

When time really does matter



THE DOCTOR IS IN
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Some of my readers may remember a column I'd written a few years ago after my cellphone fell out of my pocket when out walking. My son managed to actually retrieve it, after sending it a message informing the finder that he had tracked his location.

Thus, when my cellphone company insisted on giving me the latest update and with it I was told I must now enter a new security code and my fingerprint for posterity, I decided in this day and age it may not be such a bad idea to protect my property.

I picked my four digits, pressed the index finger of my right hand every which way possible as directed, and I was good to go. Or so I thought.

It is now a few weeks later and it is beginning to appear that using my finger each time I want to even answer my phone or do anything at all with it is more of a nuisance than I anticipated. While I'm predominately right-handed, I'm often holding something in that hand and when I'd offer my left finger, it was not the one programmed into the phone. More often than not, I find myself putting in the digits with my left hand, moving things from hand to hand. Either I'm on my phone too much (quite possibly) or it simply doesn't allow for much time before it requests that I re-enter my code yet again, as more often than not it does not seem to recognize my fingerprint.

Before reverting back to life before a security code, for now, I am trying to "learn" whatever I am meant to from this experience and grow. Trying to exercise a tremendous degree of patience over wasting time on something seemingly so stupid, I remind myself that there must be some meaning in all of this.

WHILE BEING forced to adapt to multiple challenges during this very difficult year, many of us have shown tremendous patience, flexibility and resilience.

Time has seemed to both slow down and speed up in "this year that wasn't," as one holiday slid toward another, summer seemed nonexistent, the school year never really started, we endured two lockdowns, and one day often felt much like the next.

Maintaining our sanity and good physical and emotional health has at times been extremely challenging in a world in which we have been socially disconnected. At times, we questioned what day it was, whether it was worth it to get dressed and then how we'd spend the day once we did.

Now more than ever, a seemingly simple decision as to how we choose to use our time or our phone and other technological resources, takes on greater significance and deserves further examination as we stop for a moment and reflect.

When you think of the word 'Hinenei,' in what ways are you fully present?

THE PAST few weeks have led to reflection in other ways as well. Reeling still from the sudden and untimely death of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, I have found myself, along with so many others, going over many of his masterful talks, videos and articles. One in particular caught my attention and was just one of the many brilliant epiphanies he seemed to have had.

In 2016, just after a very divisive American election and the death of Leonard Cohen, Sacks looked at Cohen's song "You want it darker," and the theme "hine-

ni - here I am" which was found in both the song and that week's Torah portion, *Vayera*. When Abraham tells God "Hineni, Here I am," at the Binding of Isaac, he is not referring to a physical place but rather his emotional or spiritual place, being fully committed and in the present moment.

Perhaps having slowed down a bit, as COVID has now forced us to do, gives us the opportunity to determine "where we are" as we search both inward and with regard to others, how we choose to use our time and in what way we can work to become truly more present focused, in the here and now, and at this moment.

Here are some questions that I am leaving with you to ponder. While I've raised some of them before, I feel that they are definitely important enough for us to revisit.



HAS YOUR perception of time changed? (Needpix)

1. When you think of the word "hineni," in what ways are you fully present, focused and attentive to others, listening and reaching out to others, without multitasking or other distractions?

2. How has your perception of time changed? In what ways has it slowed down or sped up, do you have too much time or not enough? How do you now spend your time, and have you changed your routine? Do you stay in casual clothes all day, take the time to make new recipes and cook healthy meals, find a way to exercise and get out of the house even while you may be at home more? With no "place" to go, do you travel virtually to other countries and enjoy the sites?

3. Are you using your time wisely, constructively and in the way in which you would like? Are you productive and accomplishing all that you set out to do? Are there other and perhaps better ways to use your time? What other things would you prefer to do and why, and if now is the time to pamper yourself a bit, what is holding you back? Does your day feel balanced, and is there a way to improve it?

4. With the world slowing down somewhat, how has it made you feel? Are you bored? Do you enjoy spending time alone? Have you reached out to others? Are these relationships more or less important to you? How have they changed? Are you happy to see people and feel energized by them, or do conversations feel stale? Can you talk about things other than COVID-19?

5. In what way do you put meaning into your life, and is there a way to do more?

6. In what way are you using video chats such as Zoom? While they are perhaps exhausting, are they helpful and in what way? Do they enable connection for you in a good way? Do they feel all-consuming of your time?

7. In what ways has screen time enriched your life? Do you find yourself doom-scrolling, digitally distracted and wasting time, and if so, why? What could and would you change?

8. Would you describe yourself as present focused, living in the moment, or focusing on the past or future? What would help you be more present focused?

9. Have you opened yourself up to new opportunities, discovered or renewed a latent talent or hobby, engaged in online classes, or retrained professionally to become more marketable in a way that you might not otherwise have done, in this corona period? How have you benefited?

10. What is one small thing that happened to you in your world of yesterday that has helped make you a better person today?

11. How are you feeling about the future? Are you ready for a vaccine and to move on?

As we prepare to light our Hanukkah candles this year, let's ensure that we take the time to remind ourselves that even in the midst of all the darkness we have felt in our world, which feels fractured at this moment, the light is always there if each and every one of us chooses to avail himself/herself of it. ■

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