

Va Yakel 2017

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick 3/25/17

The other day I was having a conversation with a friend and she said to me, "I never have enough time for myself. I am so busy I barely have time to think." And her words resonated with me. It's something I hear quite often, and quite frankly, it's something I say to myself as well. But I was too busy to give it too much thought. Then I read an article about Warren Buffet. Two things in that article stood out in my mind. The first was that Warren Buffet, the world's greatest investor said, "The most important investment you can make is IN YOURSELF. You are your most important asset." And that resonated with me. The next thing that struck me was when he asked a group of high powered investors if they wanted to see his date book. Of course! Who wouldn't want to see all the important appointments Warren Buffet has! So he took out his date book and showed them that every page was blank. He said, "That's because I spend most of my time thinking. I have good ideas because I give myself plenty of time to think." Then and there I realized that I am not too busy to give myself time to think about how I use my time.

There are 168 hours in a week. 24 times 7 is 168 hours. That's a lot of time. If you are working a full time job that's 40 hours a week. If you get eight hours of sleep a night that's another 56 hours. That still leaves 72 hours for other stuff. That's a lot of time. You say you are working 50 hours a week? OK. But that still leaves 62 hours for other things. You say you are working 60 hours a week, that still leaves 52 hours. You say you are working more than 60 hours? Maybe, but there was a study comparing people's estimated work week with actual time diaries. They found that people claiming to really be working (not just sitting at a desk surfing the internet) 75 or more hours a week were actually off by about 25 hours! So one thing these numbers pointed out to me is that I really do have time. We all have time. The question is what we do with it. The question is how we choose to use ALL our time, especially the time that is not spoken for by others.

With that in mind I opened up to this week's Torah portion. Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's about building the Mishkan - the Tabernacle - again... True - about 98% of it is. But if you looked carefully at the beginning of the portion it starts with the commandment to make Shabbos into a day of rest. Even the construction of Gd's dwelling place on earth does not supersede that. Building a sacred space for Gd does not take precedence over creating sacred TIME for ourselves. Sacred time comes first. Or at least it should. We need time to think. We need time to think about our priorities, about how we really want to be spending our time so that when those hours are available they are not wasted, or spent frivolously. The reason the Torah starts the section on working to build the Mishkan by mandating a day of rest is because Gd wanted our ancestors to have time to think - time to think about what they were about to do and why they were choosing to do it. And the same holds true for all of us. We need to create time to think about what we are doing and why we are doing it. And that's what Shabbat is really all about.

Outside of our Sanctuary, and just inside our front door, you passed a sign. It reads, "Join us in disconnecting from technology and connecting with each other." And that's not just there on Shabbat to keep people from annoying others with calls and texting. It's a statement about who we are as a congregation and what we stand for. We, the synagogue leadership, honestly believe that by disconnecting from technology we can get closer to one another and also closer to our true selves. Folks, your cell phone is robbing you of your own quality free time. Think about it. You get a free minute to think and what do you do? You check your e-mail and start deleting the old ones. It's a mindless activity and it cuts into your 62 hours. Say you check those e-mails for only five minutes an hour. That's 80 minutes a day - more than 9 hours a week!

But there is something far more insidious about having full blown computers in all our pockets. Checking e-mails and mindlessly surfing the web not only adds up, it immediately takes you away from whatever is happening in the here and now; it robs you of your time to think, your time to simply be. It pulls you away from the people you are with, and keeps you from yourself as well.

Look, if religion does not enhance the overall quality of your life, what good is it? You want Judaism to make a palpable difference in your life? Take Shabbos for yourself and take a break from your phone. You survived the bulk of your lives without it. Leave it with the ringer off in another room on Shabbat. You'll have to tell people that you don't use your phone on Shabbat because everyone is so used to having e-mail returned quickly. You know how it is. But it does not NEED to be this way - at least one day of the week. But what if there is an emergency? Well, a couple of times in the day go to the room where the phone is and turn it to the home screen only if that makes you feel better. But I am telling you from personal experience that you will have more quality time when you check your e-mails and messages less. More time to think, more time to exercise, more time to read, more time to be with your family, more time to BE. We all know that Warren Buffet is right. Your best investment is in yourself. But we don't always do what's best for us. That's why a sacred tradition, a code of Law has to step in and remind us why this is so important - so VERY important. Your time will only be sacred when YOU make it sacred - and as our parsha reminds us one of Judaism's primary functions is to help us to create sacred time in our lives.