

# MAKING GOOD USE OF TIME

ISSUE #6  
APRIL 2011  
NISAN 5771

An instructor at a time-management seminar once filled up a jar with rocks and asked the audience if the jar was full. When they responded yes, he took out small pebbles and poured them into the jar to fill the cracks. He asked again if the jar was full and then proceeded to fill the jar with sand. When he asked what the lesson is, one participant said "There are gaps, and if you really work at it, you can always fit more into your life." "No," the instructor responded "The point is this: if you hadn't put these big rocks in first, would you ever have gotten any of them in? Source: *First Things First* by Stephen Covey pp. 88-89.

R. Zelig Reuven Bengis was accustomed to finishing the entire Talmud every few months. Shortly after completing a cycle, he called his family to commemorate the completion of the Talmud. When his family members inquired how he was able to finish so quickly, he responded "This is not my ordinary cycle. Rather, I started to notice that when I would attend certain events, I had five minutes here and ten minutes there, so I started to carry my Talmud with me. This gathering is to commemorate my completion of the Talmud from the many five and ten minute opportunities that I had. (*Kovetz Beit Hillel*, Vol. 34, pp. 14-15)

**How do we make the most of our time? Let's look at the following scenarios:**

<b>CASE ONE</b>	Andrew looks forward to spending a few hours on Sunday relaxing by catching up with his friends on Facebook and reading all of the jokes he received during the week. This Sunday, he also has a long list of things to do around the house. What should take priority?
<b>CASE TWO</b>	Shira is trying to cook for Shabbat while talking on the phone helping her friend through a crisis. She notices that she is not concentrating so well on the conversation or the cooking, but she may not have time to finish cooking after the conversation. What should she do?
<b>CASE THREE</b>	About a minute into his trip home from school, Jonathan realizes that he left his knapsack at school. He knows that if he asks Mrs. Goldstein to turn around, she certainly will, but he is not sure if he should burden everyone else in the car or just deal with it when he gets home. What should he do?

## ✿ PUTTING OUR DAILY ACTIVITIES IN CONTEXT ✿

Let's begin by reading an excerpt of a poem authored by R. Yehuda HaLevi:

Servants of time are servants of servants.  
Only a servant of God is [truly] free.

עבדי הזמן עבדי עבדים הם  
עבד ה' הוא לבד חפשי.

✿ What does it mean to be a servant of time?

✿ What is meant by "servants of servants"?

✿ What is time a servant of?

✿ Is it possible for someone to serve G-d but also be a servant of time?

Rambam teaches us an important lesson about the focus of our daily activities:

A person should make sure that all of his/her actions are focused on knowing God... How is this? When one does business, it should not be for the sole purpose of accumulating wealth. Rather these activities should be performed so that one has the means of taking care of physical needs such as eating, drinking, paying for one's home and getting married ... One should make sure that one's body is healthy and strong in order that one can properly know God. For it is impossible to understand and contemplate matters of wisdom when one is starving, ill or in pain ... Even when one sleeps, if one sleeps in order to give rest to one's body ... sleeping can also be a form of service of God. On these matters, the rabbis stated "All of one's actions should be for the sake of heaven."  
Rambam, Hilchot Dei'ot 3:2-3

צריך האדם שיכוון לבו וכל מעשיו כולם לידע את השם ברוך הוא בלבד... כיצד כשישא ויתן או יעשה מלאכה ליטול שכר. לא יהיה בלבו לקבוץ ממון בלבד אלא יעשה דברים האלו כדי שימצא דברים שהגוף צריך להם מאכילה ושתיה וישיבת בית ונשיאת אשה ... ישים על לבו שיהא גופו שלם וחזק כדי שתהיה נפשו ישרה לדעת את ה'. שאי אפשר שיבין וישתכל בחכמות והוא רעב וחולה או אחד מאיבריו כואב ... ואפילו בשעה שהוא ישן אם ישן לדעת כדי שתנוח דעתו עליו וינוח גופו כדי שלא יחלה ולא יוכל לעבוד את ה' והוא חולה, נמצאת שינה שלו עבודה למקום ברוך הוא. ועל ענין זה צו חכמים ואמרו וכל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים.  
רמב"ם הל' דעות ג:ב-ג

Rambam's comments give us a further appreciation of R. Yehuda HaLevi's poem. All of our daily activities should be in context of our service of God. When all of life's activities have the same ultimate purpose, one can prioritize and balance a busy life and decide what is most important. The laws of nature, including the concept of time, are our partners in accomplishing our goals and are also considered servants of God. If one is not conscientious of Rambam's idea, it is difficult to prioritize what is important. Time now controls what gets done and one becomes subservient to time and a servant's servant because time itself is a servant of God.

**What are examples of activities that seem mundane, but really play a role in our service of God? How can relaxation play a role in our service of God? How does one determine how much relaxation is necessary? How would you apply this discussion to case #1?**

### TO MULTITASK OR NOT?

To make the most of our time, should we do things quicker, or even do more than one thing at a time (multitasking)? There are certain mitzvot that require total concentration and don't allow for any distractions. For example, one cannot pray while thinking about something else at the same time:

When one prays, one should not hold tefillin, one of the holy scrolls, a full plate (of food), a knife, money or a loaf of bread because one's concentration will be focused on these (items) so that they don't fall and one won't be able to concentrate on the prayers.  
Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 96:1

כשהוא מתפלל לא יאחוז בידו תפילין ולא ספר מכתבי הקודש ולא קערה מלאה ולא סכין ומעות וככר מפני שלבו עליהם שלא יפלו ויטרד ותבטל כוונתו.  
שלחן ערוך אורח חיים צו:א

Other mitzvot do not require total concentration. For example, one can place money in a tzedakah box while talking on the phone.

R. Elchanan Wasserman, *Kovetz Shiurim, Ketuvot 23:6*, highlights the difference between mitzvot that are process oriented and mitzvot that are result oriented. In process oriented mitzvot, the way in which these mitzvot are performed is important. If we don't have proper concentration or there are distractions or interruptions, it detracts from the mitzvah. Other mitzvot are focused on the result. It may take the distracted person longer to achieve that result, but as long as one achieves that result, the process is irrelevant.

There is a concept in Judaism related to multitasking known as *pizur hanefesh*, which is known colloquially as "spreading oneself too thin." R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntchitz explains:

<p>There is an additional challenge (faced by entrepreneurs) and that is the spreading of oneself when he and his home and his business are spread out ... because his thoughts are on his home (family) in the East and on his business in the West and on his own welfare while he is travelling between these two places. Regarding this, the wise man (cited in <i>Chovot HaLevavot, Sha'ar HaBitachon</i>) stated that God should save him from being spread out. K'li Yakar, Bereishit 49:13</p>	<p>יש בהם עוד חסרון אחד והוא פיזור הנפש כי הוא וביתו וסחורתו מפוזרים ומפורדים זה מזה ... כי מחשבתו על ביתו שבמזרח ומחשבתו על סחורתו שבמערב ומחשבתו על עצמו בין שני גבולים אלו ... ועל זה אמר חכם אחד שיצילו ה' מפיזור הנפש. כלי יקר בראשית מט:יג</p>
--	--

**↻ When is multitasking effective and when is it not? What are examples of mitzvot or activities that are focused on the process? What are examples of mitzvot or activities that are focused on the result? Is cooking for Shabbat a result oriented mitzvah? What about visiting someone in the hospital? How would you apply this discussion to case #2?**

**↻ VALUING THE TIME OF OTHER PEOPLE ↻**

The Gerrer Rebbe, R. Avraham M. Alter, once attended a meeting with twelve other rabbis. The meeting was delayed because one of the attendees arrived five minutes late. When the individual entered the room, R. Alter asked him why he came an hour late. The individual was a little puzzled until R. Alter explained that there were twelve people in the room and each one had to wait five minutes so collectively, it is as if he came an hour late (*Kovetz Beit Hillel, Vol. 34, pg. 12*).

We find the sensitivity to other people's time in the area of congregational prayer:

<p>If there are individuals in the congregation who have longer prayers, the chazzan should not wait for them, even if they are distinguished members of the city. Similarly, if [they would like to begin the service and] there is a minyan in the synagogue, one should not wait for an important person who has not yet arrived. Rama, Orach Chaim 124:3</p>	<p>ואם יש יחידים בקהל שמאריכין בתפלתן אין לש"ץ להמתין עליהם אפילו היו חשובי העיר וכן אם היה מנין בבית הכנסת אין להמתין על אדם חשוב או גדול שעדיין לא בא. רמ"א אורח חיים קכד:ג</p>
--	---

*Mishna Berurah 124:13*, does note that we wait for the rabbi because he sets the pace of the prayer on behalf of the congregation.

Jewish law even puts a price on wasting other people's time. *Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat* 333:1, states that if someone hires a worker and then decides that he does not need the worker, if he notifies the worker before he arrives, there is no monetary consequence. However, if he notifies him when he arrives and it is the fault of the employer, he must be compensated for his time.

➤ **What does this teach about the value of other people's time? Is there really a price for someone's time? How would the following factors play a role in case #3: distance from Jonathan's house to the school, number of people in the car, the consequences of not having his knapsack?**

Compiled by Rabbi Josh Flug, Director of Torah Research, CJF

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF AUTHORS CITED

**R. Avraham Mordechai Alter** (1866-1948) was the third Gerrer Rebbe. He is also known as The Imrei Emet, after his works by the same name. He lived most of life in Poland, but was able to escape to the Land of Israel in 1940 and avoid the Holocaust.

**R. Zelig Reuven Bengis** (1864-1953) was the rabbi of a town in Lithuania before moving to the Land of Israel in 1937 to join the Edah Charedit, which he became the head of in 1948. He authored a seven volume work on the Talmud titled *L'Flagot Reuven*.

**Stephen R. Covey, Ph.D.**, (b. 1932) is best known for his *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. He is currently a professor at the Utah State University business school. He runs a number of programs on leadership and productivity.

**R. Yehuda HaLevi (12th century)** was a poet, philosopher and physician. He is most well known for his philosophical work, *The Kuzari*, though his poems were very popular during his time. He lived most of his life in Spain and chose to live his final years in the Land of Israel. He died there a few months after his arrival.

**R. Moshe Iserles** (1520-1572) also known as Rama, an acronym of his name. He is most well known for his glosses on *Shulchan Aruch*, which are considered authoritative for Ashkenazi Jews. He spent most of his life in Krakow, Poland. In addition to his numerous works on Jewish law, he also wrote philosophical works.

**R. Yosef Karo** (1488-1575) is most well known for his *Shulchan Aruch*, The Code of Jewish Law. Born in Toledo Spain, his family was forced to leave Spain in 1492 when they settled in Portugal and then Bulgaria. He eventually settled in the Land of Israel about 1535. Aside from *Shulchan Aruch*, he authored numerous works including *Kesef Mishneh* and *Beit Yosef*.

**R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntchitz** (1550-1619) served as the rosh yeshiva in Lemberg. He then became the rabbi of Prague. He was most well known for his homiletical interpretations and his commentary on the Torah titled *K'li Yakar* is considered one of the standard commentaries on the Torah.

**R. Moshe ben Maimon** (also known as Rambam and Maimonides, 1138-1204) is one of the most famous rabbis in Jewish history. His works on Jewish law and Jewish philosophy are extremely influential and are studied regularly by students of Jewish law and philosophy. He began his life in Cordoba, Spain but eventually settled in Egypt.

**R. Elchanan Wasserman** (1874-1941) was the rosh yeshiva of the yeshiva in Baranovitch, Poland. He was a student of R. Chaim Solovetchik and R. Yisrael Meir Kagan (the Chafetz Chaim). He has numerous works on tractates of the Talmud. He was murdered during the Holocaust.