

Do you know that if you live in Australia that it is law that an employer gives every employee 20 days of paid vacation a year? And even with that legally set amount, Australians actually take an average of 25 paid days of vacation a year! If you live in Denmark, employers are obligated to give workers 25 paid days and they actually take an average of 30. Even if you live in China, the government obligates employers to offer 15 paid days of leave a year. Do you even need to guess how many paid days our American employers are obligated to give us each year? Zero. Do not worry, those of us who live in one of the wealthiest and most progressive countries in the world take an average of a whopping 10 days a year. In the end when all of our working and non-working hours are totaled up for the calendar year, we Americans will work nearly nine full weeks (350 hours) LONGER per year than our peers in Western Europe do.

Not only do we Americans work more than the citizens of any other industrial country in the world today, but we work more than we used to. Living in the 21st century with all of its technological and industrial advances we enjoy, we as a country are putting in longer hours on the job now than we did in the 1950s. Not only do we work more than our parents and grandparents did, but statistics tell us that it appears that we even work more hours than medieval peasants did. So, the serf working on the land of the lord of the lord of the lord - had more leisure time that we do!

We have a problem. These numbers reflect the poverty of time in our lives only from statistics based on the work force, they do not even delve into the time crunch for those lives outside the measurable reach of the work force. They do reflect an even larger malady. Even though I do not have the numbers to make us think about it, I don't need numbers. I need to ask us to take a moment to think about our lives -- about the demands on our time, about the way we choose (or feel we have to choose) to spend time. Think about: the time at work vs. at home; the time at home at the television or on the internet; the time in the car taking yourself or your kids to the activities that fill their lives; the time shopping for or maintaining the things we have or feel we need to sustain our style of living.

You do not need numbers to know we have a problem. There is a palpable sense in many of our lives that we are on a fast moving train and have no way to stop and get off. Even when we make these choices that seem to perpetuate this state of affairs - we have good reasons to stay on that train ... I know it is the weekend, but we could use the extra money; I know that they are already busy, but the activities are good for the kids; I know I would rather spend some time reading

or hanging out, but we need get those clothes, food or other necessities; I know it seems crazy busy now, but it will get better we will not always feel this way.. All the things we need and want - fill our times and fill our lives, but do they fill our souls? Tonight is the night that we recognize the passage of year, yes - marking time. More importantly as we say a year has passed, we make a commitment and effort to assess: how we have used that time; how we have spent that time; and if we have made the most of the gift that was this past year of our lives; AND then to ask: How we will make the most of the time will be blessed with in the coming year?

What is the nature of this problem? The problem is not with 'work' itself. Working and doing those things that help to sustain our society and progress our civilization are essential to our world. Our tradition acknowledges that work is a part of life and it is okay to work and work hard - to take pride in whatever that work may be. We are taught, *Im ayn kemach, ayn Torah, Im ayn Torah ayn kemach* - without flour there is no *Torah*, without *Torah* there is no flour. Flour, bread - physical everyday sustenance. The work of the physical world in which we live. *Torah* - learning, light, spirit - the quest and encounter with the ethereal - with that which is beyond and also infuses our physical world. No, work is not the problem. We have got plenty of that, plenty of *Kemach* - flour, physical things to sustain us. The problem is that we have no balance to our work. We have no *Torah* - no light, no spirit. Pursuing the *Kemach* - the Flour - the stuff that we need to live in our world has become our end-all-be-all.

This problem, sadly, is not new. I know it spans my lifetime. Some 26 years ago President Jimmy Carter named it in this manner, in what has become know as his Malaise Speech:

... after listening to the American people I have been reminded again that all the legislation in the world can't fix what's wrong with America. So, I want to speak to you first tonight about a subject even more serious than energy or inflation. I want to talk to you right now about a fundamental threat to American democracy.

The threat is nearly invisible in ordinary ways. It is a crisis of confidence. It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our Nation.

The erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America ...

... Our people are losing ... faith ... In a nation that was proud of hard work, strong families, close-knit communities, and our faith in God, too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns. But we've discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning. We've learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose.

President Carter saw our culture focusing itself on self-indulgence and consumption, pursuing things and stuff - becoming only about the *Kemach*. In turn, as we have continued to do for decades since - we choose to use our time for only these pursuits of the things and stuff that fill our physical worlds, but do not begin to fill our souls. Sometimes, we make these choices with full cognizance and will, and at others we feel swept up in the powerful tide of what our society is doing.

And perhaps this malaise is not that new at all, we only experience it so acutely because we are in the midst of it and our advances tease us with the prospect of an alternative reality. I suggest it is not that new, because our sages and our stories offer us a larger context from which to see our existence and frame it in a different manner.

Once, Rabbi Baruch's grandson Yehiel was playing hide and seek with another boy. Yehiel hid himself well, and waited for his playmate to find him. He waited a long time, and finally decided to emerge from his hiding place. When he did, he saw that the other boy was nowhere in sight, at which point Yehiel realized that the boy had not looked for him - for his friend had gotten distracted with other things. Weeping, he came to his Zayde to complain of his faithless friend. Rabbi Baruch's eyes, too, brimmed over with tears, and he said, "God says the same thing: I hide, but it seems that everyone forgets they are looking. No one wants to seek Me anymore!"

As Rabbi Baruch shares the frustration of the Ultimate One with his grandson, he is also teaching us something about our world and our pursuit of God, of Torah

of something to fill our souls. Rabbi Baruch teaches us that to some extent the things we do to survive in our world - things that our tradition acknowledges are real and necessary - sometimes these choices hinder our finding the spiritual, the divine, God. The Baal Shem Tov enhances Rabbi Baruch's story by reminding us, too, that our world is merely an illusion - that there is something greater, deeper than what we know with our senses. Our choices with how we spend our time must reflect this awareness and balance.

To grasp this balance intellectually, is much easier than to put it into action in our lives. We are blessed to live when and where we do - as Americans in the 21st century - and yet we live in a time and place that offers up a somewhat insurmountable obstacle to living according to this balance. In only a month or so we Americans will confront the onslaught of these obstacles as we will be reminded of the need to spend our money and our time buying stuff for the people we love. We Jews, and many of our Christian friends, will feel this dilemma of how we balance the *Kemach* and the *Torah* as we prepare to celebrate Chanukah or Christmas. It may be the story of Chanukah itself that offers us some perspective and even inspiration in making choices that reflect our highest values. The heroes of the Chanukah story, the Maccabees, were facing a few obstacles of their own. Yes, the Assyrian power had desecrated and dishonored the Temple, but something else was amiss in Judea. More threatening and more pervasive was the power of the Hellenistic culture that pervaded Judea at that time. The Hellenistic culture offered great scientific, intellectual and technological advances to the people of Judea, but did so in a manner that eclipsed some of their broader values. It was the Maccabees, who miraculously stood up to that powerful culture and its sway over the people who lived there and said, 'Wait! We have plenty of *Kemach*, we need more *Torah*!'

Rabbi Michael Lerner expresses the Maccabees efforts in this manner,

"The miracle of Chanukah is that so many people were able to resist the overwhelming "reality" imposed by the imperialists and to stay loyal to a vision of a world based on generosity, love of stranger, and loyalty to an invisible God who promised that life could be based on justice and peace. It was these "little guys," the powerless, who managed to sustain a vision of hope that inspired them to fight against overwhelming odds, against the power of technology and science organized in the service of domination. When this kind of energy, what religious people call "the Spirit of

God," becomes ingredient in the consciousness of ordinary people, miracles ensue."

Their recognition and their response to the imbalance in their world is no less than a miracle. It is essential for us to embody the courage and resolve of the Maccabees. We must recreate the miracle of a small group that stands up against the wave of a larger culture and recaptures and re-establishes the values and the truths that transcend the institutions and movements of their time. To fight in this manner is a very Jewish thing to do. I believe that it is upon us to look at the imbalance in our society in the same manner -- and to stand up and fight against it by creating a new reality in our own lives and in the world around us.

This leads us to the question, 'What can we do?' Our tradition offers us a place to start. It offers us a simple, yet still radical and dramatic concept in this fight for our temporal lives. Inherent in our tradition is the idea that we have an obligation - not merely a right or privilege - but an obligation to stop, to not work, to regain the balance of our lives. You may know this radical ideology by its Hebrew name, Shabbat. I do not mean the simple act of lighting candles or blessing wine -- these acts merely set-up and frame the true nature of the Sabbath. The heart of Shabbat is making time different from the rest of the week -- when we are called upon and expected to work hard in our endeavors. Our tradition understands that a crucial component to our spiritual health is making time for Torah - play, peace and light.

There is a story of a queen who liked to go out into her land disguised in peasant's clothes so that she could mingle and get to know her subjects. One Friday afternoon she wandered toward a part of town where a Jewish family lived. Wafting from their windows were the wondrous smells of the Sabbath meal. With Shabbat approaching, she knocked on their door, curious as to what exactly she smelled. The family not only welcomed the stranger in, but when discovering that she had no place to go for Shabbat - they invited her for the Shabbat meal. As good as the aromas were, the taste of the food was even better. After a night of food, conversation and genuine warmth the queen felt very good. The queen determined that she must discover what magical spices the family used to create such delicacies. She asked, but when they replied with a list of simple household spices, the queen figured that they were hiding the secret. Fortunately, the family had invited the queen back for next Shabbat. So, the next week the

queen brought her royal chef - disguised as well - so he could come and determine the identity of the magic spice. Again, the food was marvelous - the queen felt such warmth and peace - and to boot, her chef had said that he thought had figured out the identity of the magical spice. The next night she asked for the same meal - to be shared with her family and royal court. She also invited her new Jewish friends to repay their hospitality. The meal was prepared by the land's greatest chefs, with the best kitchen utensils, with the highest quality meat and freshest herbs and spices and served with the finest linens and silverware, by the best trained servers and yet, it was good, but not the same. The queen was crestfallen and upset. She excused herself to the kitchen to give the chef a piece of her mind ... the chef explained that in all his years of experience, he was 100% sure that there was NO spice he missed - it was exactly as the family had prepared it. Finally, the queen invited the family into her chambers, to hopefully get them to share with her the magic spice. That is simple, the father replied - the magic spice, as you call it, is Shabbat itself. It is the element of spiritual nourishment that we serve with the meal. Every other meal we share is shrouded in the busy and important work of our lives - but on Shabbat, we turn away from the world and its physical needs, and tune into the ones of our souls. That is the spice that makes our meal like no other.

Tonight on this sacred occasion as one year of our time turns into another, we look at our lives and our world and see how this spice is the one so lacking from the nature of our world. We pray that we are able to integrate into our lives -- we must do so - our spiritual health obligates us. We pray that we find inspiration from our Maccabee ancestors and make choices in our personal lives that bring more balance to our style of living. We pray that we are able to support institutions and leaders who understand this dynamic and work to create a world that is not driven merely by things and spending time to make and maintain them. We pray for the vision of seeing our time as a garden for both *Kemach* and *Torah*.

Allow me to finish these prayers, with that of poet Abbe Michel Quoist:

All people complain that they haven't enough time. They look at their lives from too human a point of view. There is always time to

do what God wants us to do, but we must put ourselves completely into each moment that he offers us.

I went out, God. People were coming and going, Walking and running.

Everything was rushing: Cars, trucks, the street, the whole town. People were rushing not to waste time. They were rushing after time, To catch up with time. To gain time.

Good-bye, Sir, excuse me, I haven't time. I'll come back. I can't wait. I haven't time. I must end this letter--I haven't time. I'd love to help you, but I haven't time. I can't accept, having no time. I can't think, I can't read, I'm swamped, I haven't time. I'd like to pray, but I haven't time.

You understand, God, They simply haven't the time. The child is playing, she hasn't time right now...Later on... The schoolboy has his homework to do, He hasn't time...Later on... The student has her courses, And so much work...Later on... The young married couple has their new house; They has to fix it up...They haven't time...Later on... The grandparents have their grandchildren. They haven't time...Later on... They are ill, they have their treatments, They haven't time...Later on... They are dying, they have no... Too late!...They have no more time!

And so all people run after time, God. They pass through life running-- Hurried, jostled, overburdened, frantic, And they never get there. They haven't time. In spite of all their efforts They're still short of time, Of a great deal of time. God, you must have made a mistake in your calculations, There is a big mistake somewhere. The hours are too short. Our lives are too short.

You who are beyond time, God, You smile to see us fighting it. And you know what you are doing. You make no mistakes in your distribution of time to human beings. You give each one time to do what you want her or him to do. But we must not lose time, waste time, kill time, For it is a gift that you give us, But a perishable gift, A gift that does not keep.

God, I have time, I have plenty of time, All the time that you give
me, The years of my life, The days of my life, The days of my years,
The hours of my days, They are all mine. Mine to fill, quietly,
calmly, But to fill completely, up to the brim.

May our time we spend in 5766 fill us completely, up to the brim.