The sound of ticking clock for a minute.

When I was younger, life seemed to stretch endlessly before me. When I was younger, it seemed that I had all the time in the world.

But lately, I have become very conscious of how fleeting time really is. This realization makes me want to slow down - but instead, I continue to rush through my life.

And I sense that I am not alone. In fact, I think most of you relate to what I am feeling.

Except for the hours when I am sleeping, I am constantly on the move. I spend my waking hours trying to fit in all the things that I plan to accomplish for the day. I rarely allow myself to just sit down and be still.

Sitting still and savoring the moment has been difficult for me as this past year has brought me its share of challenges. Most recently, I was not able to walk for two weeks because I fractured my foot. This “nuisance” literally slowed me down -- but it also made me realize that even when I am in this kind of challenging situation, there are so many things to appreciate. But in order to do that, I need to slow down - not only physically, but also in my mind.

As most of you will recall, I didn’t slow down even when I had breast cancer. Prior to every chemotherapy session, I told myself that this time I would just watch shows or read a book to take my mind off the process. Instead, while undergoing treatment, I would end up working all four hours.

After my cancer ordeal, I felt that “I got it” - that I finally understood the essence of what is important. I understood the need to slow down. But then routine took over again. And again I started feeling like the rabbit from Alice in Wonderland, trying to fit even more items into my schedule .

Why didn’t I slow down? Because I felt the urgency of time.

Time is, after all, our most essential resource. Let me explain what that means by referencing words that were written over 400 years ago. There is an old synagogue in a small village in Poland, a village that no longer has any Jews within it. There is a quote that is framed on the wall of the sanctuary. The quote comes from “Sefer Ha-Chaim”, the Book of Life, published in Krakow in 1593. The author was Chaim Ben Bezalel. He wrote the Book of Life during the two months in 1578, when he was confined to his house as a result of a plague. He wrote that he was a refugee from the Angel of Death. These are his words (which, when you realize that he wrote in the midst of a plague, suddenly take on new meaning:

“People worry about losing their money and they never worry about losing their days. Your money won’t help you, and your days will never come back.”

Why do you think they put those words on the wall of that old synagogue? They put those words on the wall because they wanted to remind the worshippers to slow down. They put those words on the wall to remind people that you cannot earn all the money in the world - money comes and goes - but the days we spend to earn them, while missing out on things we don’t allow ourselves to enjoy, will never come back. As a result, we may leave this world without ever doing what we truly want. The things we really care about may include visiting places on your bucket list, learning a new skill, getting together with friends or spending more time with your spouse or your children or other family members.

Carl Honore in his book, “In Praise of Slowness”, recalls that he caught himself rushing through reading his son a bedtime story. He writes: “Part of me feels horribly selfish when I accelerate the bedtime ritual, but another part simply cannot resist the itch to hurry on to the next thing on my agenda - supper, emails, reading, bills, more work…”

I felt that he expressed exactly the same thoughts that are in my head these days. I also remember that when I finally let go of thinking about the “to do” list that kept creeping up in my head while I was reading my daughter’s favorite stories, both of us enjoyed it so much more. My being really present in the moment enhanced the experience for both of us.

Remember the saying in the Polish synagogue? Providing for the family is not enough to sustain the family. We have to invest our time to be “present” with the family, with our children. I don’t need to tell you how fast they grow up. We can never get back that time we wanted to linger just a little longer in their room before they fell asleep. (Hum “Is this the little girl…from Fiddler on the Roof.)

And as for our children learn from a young age that sitting around and playing with toys or reading a book is a luxury they cannot afford because they are already learning the restrictions of being on a tight schedule. There are art classes, gymnastics, ballet, karate, learning another language, or piano lessons - you name it! All of these activities fill every day on the calendar of preschoolers and young children before they even hit junior high. They are lucky if there is a time left for an impromptu playdate on the calendar.

In a way, we enjoy being busy. It gives us an adrenalin rush, a certain feeling of accomplishment. We brag about being busy - it has become a sign of success.

Our days are a constant race with trying to stay on top of all the tasks we plan for the day. And yet, we are under the false illusion that we are in control of our schedule.

We believe that if we write down everything that we need to accomplish in a day, we will get it done. We have our lists and we check off items and tasks as completed.

In fact, it is the other way around. Our calendar consumes us and we constantly feel that we are running “behind schedule” As we try to squeeze in one more thing before the day ends.

And as if our household and professional tasks weren’t enough, we have to catch up with social media, apps and emails that are not work related. There is always another article to read, another video to watch, another game to play.

In Greek mythology there is a character, Sisyphus, founder and king of Ephyra. You have probably heard of him. He was punished by Hades (god of the dead and the king of the underworld), for cheating death twice. For his punishment, Sisyphus was condemned to roll an immense boulder up a hill - only for it to roll back down every time it neared the top. He had to repeat this action for eternity.

That’s how our lives sometimes feel. No matter how much we accomplish, no matter how many emails we clean from our mailbox, there will always be more and more and more – each demanding our time and immediate attention.

"The day is short, and we have a lot of work to do," say our sages. The Talmud warns, "Remember that the day of death approaches," which Chassidic masters explain to mean, "Remember that each day ends and never returns. Don't waste even one day.”

Meaning not waste it by over scheduling it, but rather by filling it with the meaning and purpose and yes, - rest.

It already seems like it was so long ago when we were forced to slow down because the entire world went into a Covid lockdown. Despite all the inconvenience the isolation caused , everyone noticed how much more time we spent with our family members (a little too much maybe?) and our pets. It is no wonder that after the lockdown ended so many insisted on continuing to work from home. In a way, we were forced to regain an appreciation of the value of time.

This important lesson reminds me of one of Gandhi’s most famous statements. He said: “There is more to life than increasing its speed.”

From my opening words of this sermon, you are hearing over and over how important it is to us as people and as Jews to slow down.

You know what else in Judaism helps us to slow down? It’s this day – this very day – not the Rosh HaShanah part of this day – but rather, the observance of Shabbat. The beauty of Shabbat – the essence of Shabbat – is that it makes us change our daily hectic routine and slow down for a day of REST. In ancient times everyone rested, even the animals. It was seen as critical to our existence – this concept of resting.

One of the reasons we, Jews, held fast to our faith through the centuries of expulsion, destruction and prosecution, is the fact that we had a dream - a dream of a better world. It was dream that one day the world, as Rabbi Irving Greenberg writes, will be “in its perfect state, an Eden of order and beauty….Jewish existence without a dream is almost inconceivable.”

Shabbat is the weekly experiment with that dream. In the words of Rabbi Greenberg: Shabbat allows us, on a weekly basis, to have a glimpse of that world, and to have a taste of that world. Through Shabbat people “drew the strength to renew their dream again and again.”

We need Shabbat to help us release the tension of the week, to cope with the negativism and burdens of life and as they say, we all want to “live the dream”. Shabbat is our connection with our Creator. If God rested, then surely we, too, have to rest.

But it is not as simple as that. You know what the second commandment is? - “You shall not make idols.” What about the fourth?- “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.” If we are consumed by our desire to work, if we sacrifice our relationships for work, we set our work as a higher power over us. Our work becomes our idol; it becomes our god. Shabbat grounds us and at the same time sanctifies us by entering a different rhythm of life. Judith Shulevitz wrote: “Most people mistakenly believe that all you have to do to stop working is not work. The inventors of Sabbath understood that it was a much more complicated undertaking…”

In other words, the preparation for Shabbat does not start with the traditional dinner preparations. Instead, everyone has to be in the right mind set to enter Shabbat properly. Each person has to prepare, not only physically, but also mentally and spiritually. It is a meditation of sorts, when you feel that your body is slowing down and so your mind is slowing down as well. By doing so, you begin to enjoy the moment of time. Because if we are not in a moment - **we are wasting a moment** - once it is gone it will never come back.

If you don’t yet light Shabbat candles with your children or grandchildren, you should begin now to do that simple act together. Welcome in a day of rest with this symbolic gesture.

A congregant shared with me that when she started lighting the candles with her two year old daughter, her daughter thought it is someone’s birthday and got really excited. Now she impatiently waits for that day when she lights candles with mommy. Eventually, she will learn that it is Shabbat, not birthday party, but she will always associate the day and time of the ritual with something exciting and special.

No matter what your personal circumstance is, you can make Shabbat special . Think of something you never get to do during the week that would make you appreciate a day of rest and contemplation. .

Some people listen to classical music, or read, or have another pastime they enjoy. I personally like to take out family photo albums - remember, the ones with actual pictures you had to insert - and look through them. They always bring so many memories and a smile.

Today is Shabbat, and a Holy Day - we got a double decker! Doesn’t it feel wonderful to be here, in the moment, together? Remember the feeling and carry it beyond this sanctuary, beyond this day.

As your friend and as your spiritual leader, I wish you a Happy New Year, Shana Tovah and Shabbat Shalom. I hope that this year you will find a way to slow down, to experience many meaningful moments you can imprint in your memory and in that find the joy of life.