

Yom Kippur October 2016 - 5777

Tim Urban wrote the following in his piece The Tail End.

“It turns out that when I graduated from high school, I had already used up 93% of my in-person parent time. I’m now enjoying the last 5% of that time. We’re in the tail end.” Might be time for you (and me) to rethink our priorities.”

<http://waitbutwhy.com/2015/12/the-tail-end.html>

In his blog post Tim Urban created a visual layout of what 90 years of a human life looks like. He showed 90 objects representing 90 years. He then showed 1080 objects representing 90 by the number of months in 90 years. He then showed how many weeks in 90 years and how many days in 90 years all in picture form. He then expanded this post with a follow up post looking at the number of experiences he has left in the remaining years of his life. He was 36 when he wrote the post. He looked at how many times he had left going to the beach or visiting with his family, how many baseball games he might see, how many presidential elections he will experience over the course of his life, and how much time

he has left seeing the people he loves the most based on proximity and how many times a year or a decade he sees them now.

I am 3 weeks away from being 48 years old, according to Tim, I will be lucky to have 42 years of my life remaining. I can't tell you if my remaining years will be of high quality or spent fighting the deterioration of my health, mind or body, but let's just assume I have 42 good years left meaning only 42 birthdays left to celebrate with my kids, both celebrating my birthday and theirs making David 56, Yael 51 and Solly 47. I have the potential of 42 anniversaries left to celebrate with my wife, but might have less than 20 birthdays to celebrate with my mother and twenty birthdays to celebrate with my in-laws. According to my mother I might have 40 more birthdays with her because she still feels 50.

If I only see my brother twice a year we only have 84 visits left in our lifetime. This is all assuming good health, no catastrophic end to the modern world and we somehow stave off the zombieapocalypse.

My brother in law lives in Israel. I may only have 30 visits or fewer left to spend time with him and his family. If I go to Israel every few years or so, I may only see Jerusalem or the Mediterranean 20 times in the remainder of my life.

As you all know my family and I spend two weeks at camp every year. If we are lucky enough to go for the next 20 years then we have 40 weeks to look forward to spend at camp, but only 19 summers with our kids there assuming Solly returns as a counselor until he's 24. We love giving back for all the incredible experiences we had when we were campers, and hold on to each of the fourteen days we spend there.

My oldest, David, started high school this year. We are considering a High School in Israel program for him that would have him live there starting his Junior Year of High School. If this happens then I have less than 2 years, less than 104 weeks of tucking him in before he leaves home to truly begin what amounts to his adult life. Less if we subtract all the time he will spend at camp, on school trips and on youth group trips.

My wife and I have only two b'nai mitzvah remaining to celebrate with Yael and Solomon, three high school and college graduations and three weddings to celebrate if we are so lucky. With my beloved Sam of blessed memory, we only got to celebrate 8 birthdays, but the lessons he left behind force us to be present and appreciate all the little things we used to take for granted. When I went to bed Sam's last night I thought I had 24 hours left, maybe thirty hours. I thought I had time. I had sat next to him all day,

almost ten hours. I crawled into bed at 9:30pm and lay in bed for his last three hours and missed those final moments thinking I had more, time I will never get back. I kick myself for not having the foresight to just stay by his side for every final minute I had, living as if everyone might be his last.

I spend each High Holy Days with you all in a most meaningful and spiritually uplifting manner. If we continue at this pace and I work as a rabbi until I am 75 some of us have 27 High Holy Days left to spend together, some of us less. At four sermons per Holiday season that is only 108 of my High Holy Day sermons you have left to listen to which at an average of 20 minutes is only 36 hours of speeches. In the old days that would have been 45 minutes per sermon and 81 hours. So in other words I end up robbing you of almost 45 hours of napping through my sermons over the next 27 years.

I didn't need Tim Urban's writings to remind me of the how much we should cherish the time and the moments we have with those we love the most. We've all had someone in our lives die who we wish we had another five minutes with. We all know that a minute is too short unless you are waiting to hear news of a job you interviewed for, of someone's health after

a surgery or accident, about a child, grandchild, niece or nephew being born.

How often do we take time for granted, wish our kids were asleep already, wish the day was over, wish this meeting would end, stayed up late wishing we had a few more hours to finish a task and then dreaded waking after two few moments of sleep? How many hours do we spend on facebook rather than looking a dear friend or loved one in the face and actually hearing about their day or week? How many moments have been lost because we were drawn to stare into the black mirrors we call phones rather than looking up and around, allowing our minds to be present and take in our surroundings? Too often we allow our distractions to eat up the precious time of our life. Too often we waste entire days accomplishing nothing.

How much time do any of us have left with any of the people we love most in our lives? We all know the projected numbers, we can all gauge the health and well being of those closest to us, but we don't take a measure of the real time limits we have on our lives. We ignore them as best we can so that we can be surprised when time runs out and try not to be filled with

regrets when someone we love has died, leaving us only memories to hold onto.

My father died when I was twenty three. I have now lived longer without him than I did with him. Our last five years as a complete family I was in college and started grad school, so I spent most of those years away from home, only seeing my parents during holidays and school breaks. Taking summer classes for three years, during undergrad, I spent almost 36 months straight taking classes in Florida. Those three years were over 1/6th of the time I had to know and appreciate my father. We didn't have email, internet or FaceBook to communicate daily, if we were lucky we spoke once a week while I was away studying and preparing for my adult life. I've talked to or texted my mother once a day easily for the last ten years and we live in the same city. I see my mom and my in-laws at least 2-3 times a week in addition to all the calls and messages back and forth. Life has forced me the hard way to understand the precious nature of time and how to measure the moments I spend with those I love most in the world. For many of us we have experienced the pains in life that make us hold on tightly to what is most precious in our lives. We all at one time or

another experience grief, experience time we thought we had with a loved one taken away abruptly.

There is a famous Buddhist parable called The Mustard Seed. It revolves around a woman whose only son dies young. Unwilling to accept his death, she carried him from neighbor to neighbor and begged for someone to give her medicine to bring him back to life. One of her neighbors told her to go to Buddha, located nearby, and ask him if he had a way to bring her son back to life. Bringing the body of her son with her, Kisa found Buddha and pleaded with him to help bring her son back to life. He instructed her to go back to her village and gather mustard seeds from the households of those who have never been touched by a death in the family. From those mustard seeds, he promised he would create a medicine to bring her son back to life. Relieved, she went back to her village and began asking her neighbors for mustard seeds.

All of her neighbors were willing to give her mustard seeds, but they all told her that their households had all been touched by death. They told her, *“the living are few, but the dead are many.”*

As the day became evening and then night, she was still without any of the mustard seeds that she had been instructed to collect. She realized then the universality of death. With this new understanding, her grief was calmed. She buried her son in the forest and then returned to Buddha. She confessed to Buddha that she could not obtain any of the mustard seeds he had instructed her to collect because she could not find even one house untouched by death. To which the Buddha responded.

*“Dear girl, the life of humans in this world is troubled and brief and inseparable from suffering, for there is not any means, nor will there ever be, by which those that have been born can avoid dying. All living beings are of such a nature that they must die whether they reach old age or not.*

None of us is exempt from the suffering of life. But what Tim Urban tries to teach us is how to appreciate the moments we have rather than waiting to live for those moments we hope for.

For myself, I've created a life where I spend my days getting to know you and your families, and spend time with you participating in your life and lifecycle moments as the central purpose of my life. I am ever grateful for being allowed into your lives and to see through your eyes all the people



you hold dear, and actually get to be part of some of the most precious moments you experience, the birth of your children, their coming of age, standing beneath their wedding chupahs with you, the namings of your grandchildren, and of course there are those moments when we stand together to bid farewell to family members hopefully after long fulfilling lives. We are strong as a community because we let each other in and share our powerful moments with each other.

Yom Kippur is about looking up. It is about counting the moments. It is about 24 hours of fasting, of thinking about time in a different manner, about taking stock of our lives. It is about acknowledging that we can do better. We count our time in years, when we forget that not even the next minute is guaranteed. It isn't that we should worry about if we will make it to the next moment as much as we should be grateful for every moment we have to share with those we love the most in this world.

It is part of our tradition that when we first wake from our sleep we have been taught to give thanks with the prayer Modeh Ani,

“I offer thanks to You, living and eternal King, for You have mercifully restored my soul within me; Your faithfulness is great.”

Yom Kippur is our wake up call. It is the time we are forced from our slumber and shaken to realize in the hunger of our communal fast how precious every moment is that we spend together. Our liturgy emphasizes the opening of the gates of repentance and forces us to ponder who will be written in the book of life and who will not. Who shall live and who shall die it chants to us, those words turning our minds to the Leonard Cohen song inspired by those words. It shakes us and holds up a mirror of our failings and gives us the opportunity to start over, to start clean again, to clear out our regrets and longings in order to begin anew in a year with new hopes and possibilities.

In this coming year I urge you all to take time to pull your loved ones closer. It is hard to believe this is only our third Yom Kippur as a community, only our second Yom Kippur back at Deerfield High School. This Yom Kippur and this year I ask you to evaluate what is important in your lives. Examine what are the things you wish to accomplish as an individual, as a parent, as a child. How many moments do we have to share a meal with our parents? With our children? With our siblings? With our best friend? How many sunrises will we get up early to see? How many beaches will we

curl our toes in the sand on warm, sunny days? How many birthdays will we celebrate together? How many anniversaries?

Yom Kippur forces us to look inward and outward. It makes us pause and reminds us we have a new year to be a newer version of ourselves, a better version than last year, a version free to be the best we can. Thank you all for the lives you share with Cantor and myself. May we all be written for a sweet and healthy year filled with laughter and countless blessings.

Kayn yehi ratzon - May this be God's will.

Choir Sings Seasons of Love from the play Rent