

Time Well Spent by Rabbi Joseph Grunblatt

„וזהו כאלוף ביהודה ועקרון כבוסי“ אלא טיאטראות וקרקסאות שלון שעתידין שרי יזודה ללמד בהם חורה ברכיב.

“Edom (Rome) will be like the princes in Judea and Ekron will be like the City of the Jebosite (Jerusalem)—these are the theaters and circuses of theirs. In the “future” the Chieftans of Judeah will teach Torah in them in public” (Bab., Tal., Megilah 6A)

According to this rabbinic interpretation the halls and arnans of entertainment will be transformed into Torah lecture halls in the world to come.

Our sages must have looked with misgivings on the great disparity in attendance between a popular Broadway show, a football field or a baseball park or Madison Square Garden during a play-off game vs. the average attendance at a Talmud Class or Adult Education lecture. They may even have compared the type of fees and salaries drawn by entertainers and those of intellectuals, particularly Torah scholars. They wanted to reassure their followers that the time will come when truth, and the word of G-d will be as popular and well received as entertainment is today and a Sheur will require a facility as large as a theatre and maybe a Talmud Chocham will draw a salary comparable to an N.B.A. first round draft pick!

But in all seriousness, a civilization must ultimately be judged by how it utilizes its ‘spare time’, the time after, ‘not at work’, after the necessities of life have been met. It is when we stop working that we become painfully aware of the passage of time.

Time is a precious commodity. It is constantly and ir- retrievably spent. It cannot be saved or replaced. Spatial objects can be accumulated, substituted for, regained, bought and sold. An empty space can be filled with a house. The house can be levelled to the ground and rebuilt. Money can be lost, regained, dispensed with and reaquired. Space may change its appearance

sins were forgiven.

It was not the High Priest, but this plain, humble Jew who received G-d’s nod. It was the Jew who led the goat in the scor- ching desert while he was fasting. There were stations in the wilderness with tents laden with food and drink. “Here have food, have a drink,” he was offered. But he declined and went forth alone in the treacherous desert. In the Temple, the Kohen Godol offered sacrifices and incense. The appointed Jew offered himself. Thus his service was most acceptable.

This is the essence of genuine Judaism—the ordinary Jew. The Synagogue has its clergy—the erudite, eloquent rabbi and the talented cantor with resonant melodious voice. But a foremost congregation has “Baale Battim” for activities. It has also those who, though with raspy voices, can lead a Minchah Service and recite the Psalms. We now have great scholars and Yeshivos. But the turn from ignorance to Torah knowledge can be affected by laymen who engage in Torah study. The future of American Judaism lies not only with more inspiring rabbis but, moreso, with more intelligent laymen.

But yet one questions presents itself. If it was the appointed man who won G-d’s approval and atonement, then why was he ignored when he returned? The High Priest was greeted after the service with jubilant celebration. And the appointed man was allowed to go home unescorted; alone, exhausted and unnoticed. Why was there no reception for the man who made the day? He deserved a hero’s parade. Was it not he who gained reprieve and forgiveness?

There may be a twofold reply. The appointed man performed his function with success because of the High Priest who stood in the Temple performing his duties. The High Priest was on his post not only for Yom Kippur but every day. The celebration was in appreciation of his year-round service. The appointed man, however, was a one-day a year man. Honor and glory do not come to one who rises for the sake of his people once in a lifetime or even once a year. Celebrated is the one who serves G-d every day.

and reappear as it was as if nothing happened. Time, once gone is gone forever. The passage of time is a constant flow towards eternity or oblivion.

The passage of time within the context of the awareness of our morality is the source of the existential dread of which modern philosophers speak. It is precisely because time is so precious that Judaism is so concerned with its use and has developed the concept of *Bittul Torah*, literally neglect of Torah, but in its concrete meaning is our name for waste of time, in fact later the expression developed '*Bittul Zman*' which is literally waste of time. *Bittul Torah* does not mean, per se, that every spare moment must be utilized for the actual study of Torah. We have to do *Mitzvos*, we have to work for community, we have to do things for our family. We may even have to rest occasionally or enjoy recreational activities in order that we may become rejuvenated and refreshed for our serious tasks in life. *Bittul Torah* means to do and enjoy useless and meaningless things in order to kill time or rather to suppress the consciousness of the passage of time because we have nothing better to do. The Talmud says "If you see suffering come upon you, analyze your deeds . . . , if you find no wrongdoings, it is very likely for the transgression of '*Bittul Torah* . . ." (Bab., Tal., Berochos 5A) This is very often a subtle transgression because it can readily be rationalized; it is not obvious and not necessarily an intrinsic wrong. But it is a crucial failing nevertheless, man can overcome the dread of passing time in two ways: either in drowning out the consciousness by *Bittul Torah* or with a deep sense of meaning through Torah in the broadest sense. Through study, through the performance of good deeds and through serving G-d and men, we make that passing time eternal. One of the sins enumerated in the '*Al Chet*' Confession on Yom Kippur is the *ראש ראלו בלנוי שחטנו לפניך על חטא שחטנו לפניך* for the sin by which we have transgressed before you with lightheartedness." Kalus Rosh is a code word for jesting, "fun" and "good times" a meaningless, temporary exhilarating use of time.

Edom's answer to the agony of passing time were theatres, circuses, gladiatorial arenas; they were the master of *Bittul Torah*. In the world to come these theatres and stadiums will be filled with people listening to the wisdom of Torah, when all mankind will learn how to make time meaningful, sacred and eternal.

The two solutions to the consciousness of time seem to exist in inverse proportions in the civilizations of the world. The enormous success of, and the fabulous sums spent on "theatres, stadiums, circuses, etc." in our time as compared to what is seen, heard and invested in Torah confirms that truth enunciated by our sages. When we led a meaningful existence of faith and deed we did not have to worry how to "kill time", nor did we need time-pain-killers.

Modern man is spending billions in entertainment attempting to anesthetize himself against the dread and anxiety of the passage of time. Instead of swimming in the stream of time toward eternity, he is hopelessly struggling to avoid drowning in it.

May we live to see the day when the princes of Judea will preach Torah in public to the masses of humanity living in peace and serving one G-d.