

Slow Down, You Move Too Fast

As the secular New Year has come and gone, I find myself in shock. 2011 just flew by. While I accomplished many of my goals, I'm still left to wonder where the time went. In an instant a year can pass us by. I hear parents say all the time, "I blinked and my child grew up." As we bring our *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* students to the ECC to celebrate, the teachers have a hard time believing that eleven or twelve years have passed from when these young adults were preschoolers themselves. We often wonder, where did the time go?

I've always been curious about this phenomenon of time flying by. I know there are 24 hours in a day, and that the year has 365 or 366 days in it, but why does the time seem to move more quickly at certain points? Is there any truth to the phrase "time flies when you're having fun"? A recent study shared on NPR addressed why time seems to go slower in your younger years and speed up and fly by when you're older. The researcher, Neuroscientist David Eagleman of Baylor College of Medicine, says that when we are younger, every experience is new, from daily activities to new information at school. We have brand new sensations and feelings and because of this our neurons are firing faster, more information is being taken in and stored, and therefore it feels like it takes longer. That's why by noon the kids in the ECC are exhausted from all of the learning and growing and they need a nap. The study goes on to explain that when we're older, our daily life is more routine, we have habits, and we're not learning as much on a daily basis. Because of this, our brains don't have to work so hard and time feels like it flies by. But time actually speeding up is, of course, an illusion.

This led me to our *parshah* this week, *parshat Vayechi*. The word *vayechi* means "and he lived," and the "he" is Jacob. Just as the text that recounts the death of Sarah has more to say about how she lived, this section of text where Jacob dies focuses on Jacob's life. What counts is not how Jacob died, but how he lived his life. Jacob is a patriarch with tremendous ups and downs. His life begins with favoritism, his parents each choosing a favorite child. He runs away from his furious brother, and then works seven years to marry one wife only to be tricked into marrying her sister. Then he marries the woman he loves, but she can't have kids. Then, his sons take away his favorite son. In *parshat Vayeshev*, when Jacob hears about his son Joseph's "death," Jacob has a choice, he can sit, as the *parshah* implies, or he can stand. Jacob chooses to sit; the text teaches "*ki Ered*": I will go down. Jacob stops living, he is grieving, and in this grief he has stopped living a life that leads to new experiences, so time flies by.

Jacob lived an incredible life, and the question for us is what does it mean to live? According to the time study, living life to the fullest is about slowing down time. When we really live, it's by trying something new. We make a change in our lives, big or small. Jacob saw plenty of changes.

The great 20th century Torah commentator Jon Bon Jovi sang "It's my life, it's now or never, I ain't gonna live forever, I just gotta live while I'm alive," urging each of us to live now, live today. Time might fly by, but only because we've settled into a routine. We have to ask ourselves if that is really living. We have a choice: we can be described as *vayechi*, and he lived, or as *va'yeshav*, and he sat. This year, try something new. Slow down time with the choice to experience a new world, to get up, to live.

ללמוד **To Learn:** ללמד **To Teach:** in this week's *parshah*, Jacob dies after blessing each of his sons and grandsons. To this day we still use this concept of blessing each Friday night as we bless one another at the Shabbat table. We ask that God help us to grow as caring, kind, loving and just people. As Jacob dies, the text teaches us that this too is a blessing. Our lives are blessings to those around us, we must use our actions, memories and deeds to lift up our community.

לשמור **To Keep:** לעשות **To Do:** Chapter 47 verse 29 features Jacob asking Joseph to pledge in “steadfast loyalty,” *Chesed Shel Emet* to take his body with them when the Israelites leave Egypt. The phrase *chesed shel emet* has come to mean “true kindness” a good deed for which no reciprocal favor can be anticipated. Discuss as a family: When's the last time you did something with no expectation of reciprocation? Why is it important to have act without expecting anything in return?