

**My child arrived just the other day
He came to the world in the usual way
But there were planes to catch, and bills to pay
He learned to walk while I was away
And he was talking 'fore I knew it, and as he grew
He'd say, "I'm gonna be like you, dad
You know I'm gonna be like you."**

**And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man in the moon
"When you coming home, dad?" "I don't know when
But we'll get together then
You know we'll have a good time then."
(Cat's in the Cradle by Harry Chapin)**

Harry Chapin's hit song reminds us how fleeting time is. The piercing lyrics of Cat's In The Cradle tell the story of a father too busy with work to see his son's first steps or teach him how to throw a baseball. Before the father knows it, the roles have swapped: the son is now too busy for his father. When the father finally retires, he finds that his son is too busy with his own family. The father realizes, 40 years too late, he'd raised his son to be just like him.

The pain of this song is only exacerbated by the fact that [Harry Chapin died](#) in a car crash at the far too young age of 38, survived by his wife and five children.

And here we sit, 35 years after his death, slaves to work and busyness.

How many of us respond to the question, "How are you?" with ["Busy!" "So busy." "Crazy busy."](#)

This 21st century obsession with busyness is sometimes legitimate, but often a self imposed mindset. Demands are high: kids, jobs, ailing relatives, homework, housework. But think about your reaction when you're asked, "How are you?" Often, we instantly go on about how busy we are instead of answering the question, "How are you?" This relentless busyness, is toxic. It makes us sick. It makes us overwhelmed. It's mentally exhausted. It keeps us from being present in the moment, always thinking about the next thing we have to do.

[In an essay on busyness](#), author Tim Kreider writes, "Idleness is not just a vacation, an indulgence or a vice; it is as indispensable to the brain as vitamin D is to the body, and deprived of it we suffer a mental affliction as disfiguring as rickets. The space and quiet that idleness provides is a necessary condition for standing back from life and seeing it whole, for making unexpected connections and waiting for the wild summer lightning strikes of inspiration — [idleness] is, paradoxically, necessary to getting any work done."

Enter: Judaism.

Judaism proscribes idleness. Judaism proscribes standing back from life and seeing it whole. That's what we're doing right now.

One of the most prolific Jewish thinkers of our time, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, writes that:

“Judaism is a religion of time aimed at the sanctification of time.”

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[\(The Sabbath\)](#)

So what does that make incumbent on busy Jews, if Judaism is a religion of time that proscribes idleness? And how, in our busy schedules, can we sanctify time?

Our tradition offers a lot of guidance.

The first and most foundational teaching of sanctifying time is Shabbat. The Torah teaches us, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work and the seventh day is a shabbat to Adonai your God [on which] you cannot do any work.” (Ex 20:9-10)

Pretty simple, but utterly fundamental to Judaism. Today, we celebrate shabbat in many ways. Coming here on Friday or Saturday. Going to a Dodgers or Angels game. Hosting a Shabbat dinner or lunch, or, Going out to eat. Maybe Saturday is family time to catch a movie or play games. The key to sanctifying time is to set it apart from the rest of the week and do something special to create what Rabbi Heschel calls a Palace in Time - and that's what Shabbat helps us do. It helps us set apart special time allocated for idleness, family, and relaxation.

The Torah teaches us that we must Shamor v'Zachor shabbat, Observe AND Remember. We must physically observe shabbat somehow - maybe saying motzi over a dodger dog - but also we must remember to be in the right mindset to sanctify time whether we're sitting in these pews on Friday night or sitting at a baseball game, eating a restaurant, or taking a walk. We must mentally be creating a palace in time by being present in these moments and being grateful for every one we get. These moments are finite and utterly precious.

Time is fleeting, and Judaism provides us with a framework to appreciate every precious moment with our loved ones.

In fact, our tradition teaches we must prioritize our loved ones over our profession. Our society talks a lot about a work-life balance, but Judaism wants your priority to be life and family. Judaism unequivocally says, “Put your family first.”

The book of Numbers (32:16) records two tribes, Reuven and Gad, asking to stay in the lands the Israelites had already con-quered on the eastern bank of the Jordan River. Why? So that “[they] might build sheep pens for [their] flocks and cities for [their] children.” - in that order. (Tanhuma, Mattot, 1:7 - [From Rabbi Elliot Dorff](#))

And the early Rabbis took issue with that order. Commenting on the verse:

“[Reuven and Gad] were more worried about their possessions than they were about their sons and daughters, for they mentioned their flocks before their children. Moses said to them: ‘Do not do that; what is primary should be primary and what is secondary, secondary. Build first cities for your children and afterwards pens for your flocks.’”

The rabbis doubled down in the Talmud.

They mandated work cannot get in the way of your relationship with your spouse. They even detailed how often men in different professions must be with their spouse. They write, “The times for conjugal duty prescribed in the Torah are: for men of independent means, every day; for laborers, twice a week; for donkey drivers, once a week; for camel drivers, once in thirty days; for sailors, once in six months.” (Talmud, Ketubot 61b)

This text is incredibly pragmatic. The rabbis understand that every job has different requirements and there isn't a one size fits all answer - and there still isn't today. But the existence of this text teaches us that people have struggled at creating a work life balance that prioritizes family over work for two thousand years.

The most quintessential rabbinic text about work life balance tells of a great difference between Baby Boomers and Millennials - no I'm just kidding - between the earlier generation of Jews and the later generations. The Talmud says, “The earlier generations made the study of the Torah their primary concern and their ordinary work subsidiary to it—and succeeded at both. The later generations made their ordinary work their primary concern and their study of the Torah subsidiary—and succeeded at neither.” (Berakhot 35b)

The rabbis are trying to teach that to succeed in life, we must sanctify time with our family and friends and make our ordinary work subsidiary to it. Otherwise, we will fail at both.

Judaism understands how easy it is to get wrapped up in work and bogged down in busyness. And Judaism suggests the antidote for this debilitating busyness is to regularly create palaces in time, unique pockets of idleness surrounded by loved ones, that enrich our lives and allow us to recharge.

I want to tell you [an old yiddish story of Lipe the Tailor](#).

Lipe the Tailor was a poor, uneducated man, who provided just enough for his wife and children to live in their cozy, little home. From Sunday to Friday, Lipe traveled from town to town, sewing and patching and repairing coats for the villagers. All week long, Lipe slept in different villages that needed his service. But, it had become Lipe the Tailor's habit over many years to rise at dawn on Fridays and finish up all of his work in the morning so that he could leave in plenty of time to be home for Shabbat. From the very moment he set out on his journey home, he could

feel all the cares of the week leave him, and his heart would fill with the joy of the approaching holy day.

One freezing winter Friday, Lipe woke up at dawn to find that it had started to snow. The villagers were expecting a terrible blizzard. Despite their warning, Lipe put on his old raggedy coat, grabbed his rusty box of sewing tools and started the long journey back to his shtetl. Lipe walked and walked and walked, trudging through the snow as it piled deeper and deeper and deeper. Soon he found himself on the edge of a forest. Lipe was hesitant to go into the forest, having heard stories of the thieves and wild animals that governed the dark, creepy forest. But, Lipe imagined, maybe his little shtetl and cozy home was just on the other side of the thick forest.

Finally, Lipe got up the courage to enter the forest. As he moved deeper and deeper into the forest, all he could see in every direction were thousands and thousands of trees. The sun fell lower and lower and lower, until Lipe knew it was time for evening prayers to welcome shabbat.

He set down his rusty tool box and tattered rucksack and began to recite the Friday afternoon prayers. When he finished praying, he looked up and saw a bright light peering through the trees. He walked closer, and closer, and through the maze of trees he began to see an unbelievable sight. Soon the distant light turned into a wondrous marble palace, with shabbos candles aglow in every window and the comforting, sweet smell of Challah encompassing the palace. He got up the courage and walked through the large beautifully ornate palace doors. In the first room he found a beautiful, crystal candelabra, sparkling in the candle light. It sat atop a long wooden table covered in a white table cloth, set for Shabbat dinner. He moved into the next chamber, which was even more beautiful than the last. A silver candelabra sat on a silver table covered in a white tablecloth, surrounded by silver chairs and set for shabbat. He moved into the next room, where a gold calendabra sat on a gold table covered in a white table cloth, surrounded by gold chairs. Each room was grander than the last. But Lipe was utterly alone, until, in the sixth and final chamber, he was greeted by a congregation of Elders who welcomed him as a guest at their prayers and meals. After praying and eating and singing and resting for all of Shabbat, they sang the concluding havdalah prayers together. And as soon as the last words were sung - POOF! - the Palace disappeared, the blizzard abated, and Lipe was standing just footsteps from his own shtetl, seeing his cozy home and humble shul in the distance.

Lipe stood there, dazzled by all his eyes had seen. "Master of the Universe! I am just Lipe the Tailor; how am I worthy of such a miracle?"

This is the palace in time we seek to create. We are all worthy of such miracles, such joy, such warmth. As the inheritors of Judaism, and as busy modern Jews, it is incumbent on us to create our own Palaces in Time. Not only does tradition teach us to prioritize our families over our work. But study after study shows that a healthy work life balance reduces sickness, lowers stress, and enables us to produce higher quality work.

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Alex Kress

So in the coming days, I encourage you to think about ways to balance your life and sanctify time with your friends and family. There is no one size fits all solution to excessive busyness. For each of us, Shabbat and holidays look a little different. But Judaism provides a universal foundation to build our own, unique palaces in time.

Every week, at the end of Shabbat, we recite the blessing of separation at the end of Havdalah.

Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, ha-mavdil bein kodesh l'chol, bein or-le'choshekh, bein Yisrael la-amim, bein yom ha-shevi'i l'sheshet y'mai ha-ma'aseh. Barukh ata Adonai, ha-mavdil bein kodesh l'chol.

Praise to you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe: who distinguishes between the holy and the ordinary, between light and dark, between Israel and the nations, between the seventh day and the six days of work. Praise to You, Adonai, who distinguishes between the holy and the ordinary.

To a year of sanctifying time and distinguishing the holy from the ordinary.

L'shanah tova u'metukah - to a sweet and happy year creating palaces in time.