

On the 13<sup>th</sup> April 1888 Alfred Nobel awoke to discover that he had died. Or at least that is what one French newspaper was reporting, as it carried an obituary for the inventor. More shocking than seeing his name on the page was the description he found. The obituary stated: "Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday." And carried the line: "The merchant of death is dead". Alfred Nobel was not only shocked to read about his death, he was also distraught at the way he was destined to be remembered.

As it turns out the newspaper had got the wrong Nobel, it was really his brother, Ludwig, who had died the previous day. This unfortunate error turned into something quite fortuitous, as Alfred Nobel gained something which few of us ever receive: an insight into the way he would be remembered after his death. Needless to say, he was less than excited about the prospect of being known as 'The merchant of death'. At the same time as gaining this insight, he also received a gift.

The gift which Alfred Nobel received, as he read his obituary that morning, was the gift of time.

He was given an extra eight years, until his actual death, to change the way that the world viewed and remembered him. In his last will and testament, the bulk of his estate was left for the establishment of prizes in the sciences, literary works, and peace. Alfred Nobel is still the inventor of dynamite, but today his name is first and foremost associated with prizes awarded to the great and good within society.

It is almost impossible to move through this period of Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur without becoming acutely aware of time. With my family, I remember the pressure of time from when we would have to finish our pre-Yom Kippur dinner and arrive at Synagogue for Kol Nidrei; for the longest time, I was unaware that the Kol Nidrei prayer was actually repeated three times. I would then sit in the congregation thinking about what percentage of the 25 hour fast was complete.

And yes, if I'm honest, I also worried about how long the Rabbi would spend on his sermon.

But on a more significant level, the Jewish calendar gives us these ten days between Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur to take time out of our normal routine, and to stop running. In these ten days, we have the opportunity for introspection, for silence and for self-reflection. In these ten days, we consider the year which has been and look forward to the year that will be.

And at this point specifically, we stand in a place of timelessness.

During Yizkor we look backwards, to our past. We remember family and friends no longer with us. We look at the empty chairs around this room, and remember the people who once filled them. We think about these people, the lives they lived, and the way in which their lives intersected with, and influenced, our own.

Now as we prepare for Yizkor's conclusion and the transition to Neilah we will begin to look forward. While Yom Kippur possesses an air of solemnity, with Neilah the mood begins to shift. There is a celebratory tone to the service. We have prayed and repented; we look forward to our inscription in the Book of life and the new year which lies ahead.

There is a moment of timelessness between Yizkor and Neilah; we stand on a bridge between past and future. It is a link between the time which we have spent and the time we have yet to spend.

Time is a fascinating commodity. We regularly speak of it in the same way that we speak about money. We save time. We invest time. We even spend time.

I often think about the popular e-mail forward which speaks of the bank account which credits us with \$86,400 each morning. Carrying over no balance from day to day, it deletes whatever part of the balance we failed to use. The e-mail asks: "What would you do?" And answers: "Draw out every cent of course!" The revelation at its end is that we do each have a bank like this; (*pause*) it is the bank of time.

How do we waste our time? How do we spend our time? And how do we invest our time?

Having moved back to America, I am once again very conscious of the distance which separates me from my family. But I never think about the distance in terms of the 3,471 miles, approximately, which are between us. Instead, I think about the fact that it would take me 11 hours door to door from our home here to my parent's home in London. And more than this, I am always mindful of the 5 hours time difference which separates us. I rarely feel the distance of space; but regularly a distance of time.

All too often we let time pass us by. We live our lives in the hustle and bustle, and we fail to appreciate that each and every day we have 86,400 seconds to use or 86,400 seconds to waste.

When we look back over the last year, or even the last week, how did we spend our time? What percentage of the week did we spend at work? How many hours did we spend with friends and family? And how often did we spend time doing one thing while preoccupied with another? Can any of us honestly say that we used the time we were given this past week in a way which makes us proud? Or did we simply let time pass us by.

A few years ago, I learnt an important lesson about the power of time. I was in Los Angeles, not due to return to England for another two weeks, when I received a call

from my father. My grandfather had been taken into the hospital, and the prognosis was not good.

Time began to move in a completely different way. The passing of days was no longer measured in hours. For me, each day was measured by a phone call to London to hear how my grandfather was. And I prayed, I prayed that my grandfather would get better, but more than this, I prayed for more time, more time with him. In the most difficult moments, I wondered about how I would feel if he were to die while I was on the other side of the world, returning just a few days too late.

Thankfully his condition stabilised, and when I returned to England, I was able to visit him in the first few hours. And like Alfred Nobel, I was graced with the gift of time. More time to spend with my grandfather, cherishing every second. As soon as you put a time limit on something, and realize that time is finite, the value of every hour, every minute increases.

Over that summer I learnt a very important lesson: every day each of us is given a choice about how we are going to spend our time. We can spend it with our families and friends, we can invest it in ourselves and our community, or we can let it slip away.

I recently read an interesting story about the true value of time.

A man came home from work late and tired to find his 5-year old son waiting for him at the door.

"Daddy, may I ask you a question?"

"Sure" replied the man

"Daddy, how much do you make an hour?"

"That's none of your business," The man responded curtly.

"I just want to know, please tell me, how much do you make an hour?" pleaded the little boy.

"If you must know, I make \$100 an hour"

"Oh," the little boy replied, lowering his head. "Dad, may I please borrow \$50?"

The father was furious, "If the only reason you asked is to borrow some money to buy a silly toy, then you can go straight to bed. I work long hard hours everyday and don't have time for this."

The little boy quietly went to his room and shut the door.

After about an hour or so, the man started to think that he may have been a little hard on his son. Maybe there was something he really needed to buy, and he certainly didn't ask for money very often.

The man went to the little boy's room and opened the door.

"Are you asleep, son?" he asked.

"No daddy, I'm awake," replied the boy.

"I've been thinking, maybe I was too hard on you earlier," said the man. "It's been a long day and I was short with you. Here's the \$50 you asked for."

The little boy smiled. "Oh, thank you daddy!" he exclaimed.

Then, reaching under his pillow he pulled out some crumpled up notes.

The man, seeing that the boy already had money, once again began to lose his patience.

"Why do you want more money if you already have some?" the father grumbled.

"Because I didn't have enough, but now I do," the little boy replied.

"Daddy, I have \$100 now, and I would like to buy an hour of your time. Can you please come home an hour early tomorrow so that we can have dinner together?"

*(pause)* This is a powerful story, and yet uncomfortable for us to hear.

We sympathise with the father who has to work to provide for his son and family. But at the same time, we feel the pain of a child who simply wants to share a meal with his dad. How important is that extra hour in the office if it comes at the expense of our loved ones?

Yet how often are our family meals interrupted by distractions from work, or elsewhere? In today's society of blackberrys and iphones even when we're at home, we still have one foot in the workplace. Our offices travel with us wherever we go, and they infringe even more on family time. And that's without even considering whether we take time for ourselves and our own needs.

As it's still Yom Kippur, I want to take this opportunity to add to the regular list of confessions which we make each year. I stand before you and confess that I have sat at the dinner table with friends and family and checked my e-mail. I confess that I have neglected friends and family because I have been consumed by work and study. And I confess that I have put things off, claiming I will get to them when I have time. Above all, I confess that I have wasted time.

How many of you would join me in this confession?

How do we all spend our time? And how do the choices we all make with our time affect those around us, those we love and care about?

On Yom Kippur we can take advantage of the timelessness of the day. We can look back at the way in which we have used, and misused, our time. And we can look forward to the new year, which presents a blank slate and a total of 525, 600 minutes for us to use.

In the title song of the musical 'Rent', Jonathan Larson poses the ultimate question: "In 525,600 minutes. How do you measure a year? At the risk of spoiling the end of the song, we discover that our year is measured in friends, in family, and in love.

At the end of the day, or year, it's really not about the 525,600 minutes, it's about what we do with them, and with whom we spend them.

Do we measure our lives in minutes? Or do we measure our minutes in the way in which we live our lives?

Time is a commodity, a limited commodity which we receive as a gift and which we are charged to use with intention and with meaning. In this way, the parallels between money and time seem very appropriate.

Just as we try not to waste our money, so too with our time. While it often feels like time is infinite, if the Yizkor service teaches us anything it is that time is finite, both our time here on earth and the time of those we care for and love.

Just as we try to spend our money carefully in order to receive good value in return, so too with our time. We need to spend our time in ways that leave us proud of what we did, and didn't do. We have the power to decide how to spend our time, and we can do it consciously and with intention.

Just as we carefully consider how to invest our money, and in ways which will assist those causes we care about, so too with our time. We must view time as an investment, not a savings. It is something to be invested in friends and family, in supporting our community, and in the causes we support.

And just as there is no such thing as free money, so too with our time. The concept of free time is really a misnomer. The way that we spend our time comes at a cost, when we spend our time doing nothing, we have less time for everything else, and everyone else.

In the current economic crisis, we can feel that our bank accounts are being drained by forces beyond our control. But the time bank that each of us possess is not affected by the economy. Each and every day, we are credited with 86,400

seconds, and at the end of the day, the balance is erased. And every year we have 525,600 minutes to use in whatever way we see fit. This coming year, how will you use those minutes?

As we move into this new Jewish year, remember Alfred Nobel and the wonderful gift he received. On that fateful day, when he read his obituary, he received the extraordinary gift of time, an extra eight years to live his life with purpose and to make things right. And in those eight years, he changed his destiny. Today, if you search for articles about his legacy you will read Alfred Nobel: scientist, inventor, entrepreneur, author and pacifist. Eight years from the merchant of death to pacifist.

It is unlikely that any of us will ever get to read our own obituaries. But when the end of our lives come, people are unlikely to talk about, or be concerned by, how we spent our money. It is the way in which we spend our time that will leave the lasting, indelible mark on the world and those we love.

It is my prayer for all of us today that we are all able to spend it wisely, invest it carefully and use our time not just to enrich our own lives, but to enrich the lives of those around us. Ken Yehi Ratzon, May it be God's will