

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

TIME MANAGEMENT: GOD'S EXAMPLE

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Life is lived at such a harried pace these days. Can God serve as an example to help us manage our time well? Of course God does!

In the first three hours of the day the Holy One, blessed be He, sits and studies Torah.

In the second three hours, He sits and judges the entire world. When He sees that the world is so guilty as to deserve destruction, He stands, covers the Judgment Seat and sits on the Mercy Seat.

In the third period of three hours, He sits and feeds the entire world, from the horned buffalo to the brood of vermin.

In the fourth three hour period He sits and plays with the leviathan, as it is said, "There is leviathan, whom You have formed to sport therewith. (Psalm 104:26)" (B. Avodah Zarah 3b)

What a fabulous role model for maintaining oneself spiritually and in one's relationships! If we were to imitate God we would spend one-quarter of our time studying Torah and spiritually nourishing ourselves, one-quarter of our time working to make the world a better place, one-quarter of our time tending to our families (for the creatures are God's family from the greatest animal--the buffalo--to the lowliest--the mouse) and one-quarter of our time relaxing and playing. If we cannot achieve that division each day, perhaps we can seek to achieve these proportions of activities over the course of our lifetimes.

The literary construction of this passage is marvelous. God sits, as befits a king, studying, judging, feeding and playing. The only time God is portrayed as moving is when God shifts from an aspect of judgment to one of mercy. The sages conceived of this shift as so great that it necessarily entailed actual realignment on God's part. In the sages' literary style, the most important part of a story happens right in its center. God's movement from judgment to mercy is the most salient part of God's day and, perhaps, the most miraculous evidence of Divine grace. Thus the moment of God's shifting from one attitude to another is placed at the heart of this passage.

Discussion Questions:

1. How could you put this model of time management to use in your own life? Is there any one area in which you are stronger? Weaker? How could you make the weaker area better?
2. Are you surprised to learn that God spends a quarter of the day playing with the family pets and relaxing? What can this teach us about healthy lifestyles that include relaxation and recreation?