

In the 17th century love poem, “To His Coy Mistress,” Andrew Marvell tells his mistress that they had better hurry and commit to one another.

*Had we but world enough and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime...*

If there were all the time in the world, Marvell says, we could spend eternity on each aspect of our relationship. But life is short, he tells her. We don’t have all the time in the world. Let’s get serious!

*But at my back I always hear
Time’s wingèd chariot hurrying near.*

I have long been haunted by this second line, the sense that time chases us down and rushes us forward. Even if we fill our time well, the months and years race ahead. I know I’m hardly the only one to feel this way. It seems as though everyone is shocked as the clock ticks by. “How is it Pesach already?” “It feels as though the year just started!” So many of us wish aloud that we could stop, or at least slow down, the passage of time.

The Torah offers us a way to imagine stopping time for a moment: notice it. This coming Shabbat—approaching Pesach-- is known as *Shabbat Hachodesh*, the Shabbat of the Month. After the reading of Parshat Tazria, we will read a special *maftir* from the book of Exodus (12:1-20) where the first commandment is given to the people of Israel. “*Hachodesh hazeh lachem rosh chodashim.*” “This month will be for you the first of the months.” As we are about to leave Egypt, God offers us this powerful first *mitzvah*; distinguish this moment, name it, and acknowledge it.

Why, of all things, would this be our first commandment? There are so many other *mitzvot* that we might consider more important as we start out on our journey as a free people. And yet similarly, acknowledging time is also the opening of the entire canon of rabbinic literature. “*From when do we recite the Shema in the evening?*” are the first words of the Mishnah and the Talmud. This is no coincidence. Creating sacred moments is the most essential goal of Jewish life. In doing so, we become free; we become a people. Simply by naming the moment, we fight meaninglessness and we stop the racing of the clock.

Of course, the most famous phrasing of this idea comes from Abraham Joshua Heschel, in his book *The Sabbath*.

There are no two hours alike. Every hour is unique and the only one given at the moment, exclusive and endlessly precious. Judaism teaches us to be attached to holiness in time; to learn how to consecrate sanctuaries that emerge from the magnificent stream of a year.

In truth, time stops for no one. Pesach is around the corner, and there’s no slowing down the race of Marvell’s “winged chariot.” But when we honor the sacredness of each Jewish moment, we are free to feel the uniqueness of each hour and to imagine that we have all the time in the world.

Let this month be for you the first of all months, the Torah tells us, and let this moment be for you, as Heschel puts it, “exclusive and endlessly precious.” *Shabbat Shalom, and Chodesh Tov.*