Sparks

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Making Every Day Count
The Key to Making Life Worth Living

One day as I was waiting for a friend, an old woman sits down next to me. Suddenly she jumps out of her seat, turns to me and yells, "I should have never left Mexico!"

I look at her and ask, "When did you leave Mexico?"

"Thirty years ago!" she cries. "And I regret it every single day of my life!"

You would think that after 30 years a person would finally get used to where they were. But people often live in the past.

One of my students, age 28, told me that his father insulted him when he was age 12 and till this day he continues to feel hurt and angry. I explained to him that although his father hurt him when he was twelve he has allowed his father to continue to hurt him for another sixteen years by holding on to the pain and constantly remembering it. I suggested that either he confront his father and try to make peace or simply let go, forget it and go on.

Not only do we often live in the past and obsess over what no longer is we also waste our time by worrying over the future or escaping into our fantasies of what will be.

Imagine that you finally take that vacation to Bermuda you had always been dreaming about. You are lying on a gorgeous beach next to the clear blue sea but your mind is a cesspool of memories and worries. Although your body is in Bermuda your thoughts are still back in the office. In your mind you are consumed in the argument you had last week with your boss hearing every mean sentence he said over and over again. And then you are ridden with anxiety as you envision the confrontation and anticipate every insult he will surely hurdle at you when you return. At the end of your vacation to Bermuda all you can say is that you were there but you were not present.

Even the simply pleasures of our daily life are sacrificed by our inability to stay focused in the now. How many times do we eat a delicious meal without enjoying even one bite because we are lost in our thoughts thinking about what will be tomorrow?

We can be so addicted to thinking about the future that when the future is finally present, we will be absent — because we will already be thinking about what comes next. Why dream our lives away? Why suffer over what was but no longer is? How can we stop living in our fantasies of the future or in our memories of the past and start living in the now?

The Torah (Bible) tells us that Sarah lived for 127 years. But the verse is very strange. It literally reads, "And the life of Sarah was 127 years, these were the years of the life of Sarah." This is a very bizarre verse, at first glance difficult to decipher. But the Sages explain that the days of Sarah's life equaled the

days that she actually *lived*. In other words, a person may die at age 127 and even though their life lasting 127 years they did not live 127 years. They may have only lived 10 years of life and wasted the rest.

So how can we choose life and make every day count?

Torah teaches that the secret to life is *kavanah*, Hebrew for "intention" or "attunement." *Kavanah* can also mean "focus" and "concentration." To live the life of *Kavanah*, for example, requires being a "concentrated" human being, concentrated on the here and now. Then life comes alive. Most people, however, live divided lives: We are here but our mind is over there; we live now but our minds are on later or yesterday. We need to give our undivided attention to the present because this is when life is happening, right here and right now. Here and now is the only place and time we can meet each other and meet G-d. Now is the time for love. Our memories of the past and our dreams for the future should be used only to the extent that they help us love each other and do good now.

The true gift of life is the present.

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