

Let me take you back 15 years. Shira, my daughter is 10 and my son Ari is 8 and I am 29.(!) By the way they are now 25 and almost 23 and I'm still 29! Steve and I decide we want to create some family togetherness time. We decide we will rotate and each of us will get a turn to pick a family activity for Saturday afternoon. Ari picks Sportsplex, and we all go out to Smithtown to that noisy arcade with lots of clacking and clicking and lots of children. The next week Shira picks Dave and Busters (there is a bit of a theme here) but we all go and we order her favorite fries. Another week, Steve picks a hike, ahh- nice and quiet we walk the circle at Caumsett state park with its beautiful views of the sound. I pick- The Lion King on Broadway -not my most economical pick, but exactly what I want to do with my family. We keep this going for several months.

Fifteen years later. I remember these events, as do the kids. We are all together, doing something. We anticipate our turn, we plan how it will unfold and we all enjoy it or at least fake it, knowing our turn will come soon. It isn't an accident that it is on Saturday- Steve and I want make Shabbat, special and memorable. So we create moments that matter.

In our lives there are several types of moments that matter - the obvious - WOW moments and the more ordinary subtle moments. Both are important. Sometimes they just happen- you drive home on the road you always take and tonight you come around the bend at just the right moment and see the most beautiful sunset. Your breath catches. You feel the grandeur of the universe, the stuff that psalms are written about- How wondrous are your works O G!d... at the work of your hands I sing to G!d. (Psalm 92) But other moments created by our efforts. A Bar Mitzvah is particularly special when the teen has put in the effort to learn prayers and Torah and pushes himself beyond what he thought he could do. A wedding is special when the Rabbi gets to know the couple and performs the rituals; and when the couple plans a party to celebrate their love with their family and friends.

Graduations, births, weddings. These are also some of the really big moments in our lives. They are singled out as momentous. They are filled with rituals to help us feel the grandeur, to allow us to transcend the ordinary. We are surrounded with family and friends who add to the specialness of the event. We take pictures and video to help us remember these glorious moments.

Being on a high like that all the time, wouldn't work. It would be too much. But letting life pass us by without creating peak experiences is not fulfilling either. My challenge to you tonight is to create more special moments, moments that elevate your soul and make you feel alive. I challenge you, to create, moments that matter.

G!d and the early Israelites know how to create powerful moments. We begin our service tonight with words that are thousands of years old: Ba Chodesh ha Shivi - In the Seventh Month, b'echad lachodesh - on the first day of the month, yihiye lachem shabaton - there shall be a sacred assembly, zicharon t'ruah - a blasting of the shofar announcing a Mikra kodesh- A Holy Day, kol m'leachet avodah lo ta'aseh - on which no work shall be done.

You can feel the power of that gathering. They felt it then and we still do it today. Every time I read this passage I feel it demands gravitas. These works evoke a moment that matters.

A peak experience is created with connection - all of them, all of us, gathered together. It breaks the script - no work, white robes. It has sensory appeal - a shofar blast, special music. There is pride- a people coming together, continuity of the Jewish people. We feel proud, we feel connected, we feel part of something larger than ourselves. It creates shared meaning- for this moment and across the millenium.

This definition of a moment that matters is from a book called the Power of Moments by Chip and Dan Heath. [\[ii\]](#) In this book we are introduced to Eugene O’Kelly. He begins his story:

“I was blessed. I was told I had three months to live.”

For the last three months of Gene’s life he creates perfect days by connecting with the people that matter to him. He draws 5 concentric circles- with his family in the middle and friends by various degrees of closeness in the wider circles. He then emails the most distant ones to settle affairs and offer appreciation. With some he makes plans - a walk in Central Park on beautiful day, dinner at a special restaurant in Manhattan, and without letting things get too maudlin, he talks to them about things that matter. He unwinds his relationships. Toward the end of his time he gathers his family together for a few weeks in Lake Tahoe and spends quality time with them.

He comes to think of these experiences as Perfect Moments, and his mission, as he sees it, to create as many of them as he can in his dwindling time.

Gene writes:

I experienced more Perfect Moments ... in two weeks than I had in the last five years, or than I probably would have in the next five years, had my life continued the way it was going before my diagnosis. Look at your own calendar. Do you see Perfect Days ahead? Or are they hidden and you have to find a way to unlock them?

Gene is reminding us not to wait for a terminal diagnosis. There are opportunities, all the time, to create, Moments that Matter.

There is a verse in the Psalms that says, *Orech yamim asbeihu*.- This phrase is usually translated as “I will nourish you with length of days”- and we interpret it to mean, G!d will bless us with a long life.

But Rabbi Naomi Levy says, “God wasn’t promising us a long life. Plenty of great, holy people don’t get to live a long life. Instead, God is promising us this: I will nourish you with long days, *oreach yamim*. Long days.”ⁱ

You could ask, Isn't each day the same length- 24 hours? Yes and no, we all have days when time drags on, we are just waiting for the minutes to pass, think -waiting for bad news or dealing with customer service on the phone. Contrast this with long days that are full and deep. In which you feel alive and in love with life. "Like you've actually *lived* the day and connected with the people you want to connect with instead of missing the day.... When time seems to stand still and your day feels rich and worthwhile. Moments when time gives way to eternity and you see your World to Come in this world."

Gene O'Kelley does that. He lengthens the days that he has left and lives a lifetime in each day.

Once, a great Hasidic Rabbi was dying. His disciples crowded around him and the great rabbi began to weep. His disciples asked him, "Rebbe, why are you crying?" The Rabbi replied: "My whole life is passing before me and I suddenly see- I had it all wrong! I was mistaken! The moments in my life that I thought were extraordinary were actually quite ordinary. And the moments that I thought were ordinary were the most luminous of all. I wish I had understood this."ⁱⁱ

There is nothing wrong with the obvious Wows, but our big challenge and our gift is to make the day at the beach, the afternoon in the park, the evening in the house, that last conversation matter. To feel how luminous the moment is. We could reframe waiting in line or making small talk with a cashier, a waste of time. But how much more special it could be if we see it as an opportunity to connect with another human being. We can be annoyed at having to drive another carpool or we can be thrilled that we get to interact with our kids and their friends, or at least eavesdrop. We can elevate these moments by reframing them so that we feel their holiness.

Another way to create moments that matter is to break the script, do something a little bit crazy, out of the ordinary. As human beings we need highs to help us to feel alive. I love this quote "We feel most comfortable when things are certain, but we feel most alive when they are not."

Break your routine and do something special - instead of going to a million soccer games - pack up the family and go to Great Adventure. Plan a spontaneous evening for your partner or a friend- go out East- walk on the beach, explore the town and have a nice dinner. Ask your kids or grandkids or neighbors kids to plan a special day for the two of you - your treat.

Think about what we remember from our lives. It is not the everyday, in and out. We are not wired to remember that. It is the days when something unexpected happens, or someone is extraordinarily kind or we get life changing news;. We don't need a lot of peak moments to have an overall good feeling about an experience, but we need some and it is okay if they are created moments.

Every year I am blessed to end the summer at Bethany Beach in Delaware with my parents and my sister, her kids, the handsome Rabbi Moskowitz and this year both of our kids could join us. Going to the beach is a moment that matters in an of itself. But within that moment I really wanted to create a peak experience that broke the script, that caused connection, that would shine and give us something to laugh about. So when my niece suggested Aerial yoga - you know that kind where you hang upside down from silks that look like a hammock, I jumped on it. And we all went. My parents took pictures and did their own version of yoga in chairs while I the rest of us ranging in age from 10 (and fearless) to 54 (and a bit more concerned about falling on my head) did a wonderful practice while hanging from silks including flipping over and hanging upside down. The whole experience was about an hour, but it create a moment that mattered. A Long day. We created a Wow moment to be remembered.

I challenge you to create memorable moments for yourself and those around you. You don't have to hang upside down. But say yes to something out of your wheelhouse. Tomorrow at a Rosh Hashanah meal go around the table tomorrow or next week and asked everyone to share. Ask a leading question - What are you most proud of since last Rosh HaShana? What is a goal you have for the coming year? What tzedakah or justice activity or giving back activity are you going to add to your life or continue this year? I ask that last one at our Passover Seder in St Louis, the table was full of Washington University students, our family and a few of my in-laws friends. We are having a nice seder up until that point. But as we went around the room it became an inspirational experience as everyone shared a social action/Tzedakah project they are involved or want to commit to starting. Ari is going to take advantage of his company's matching dollars for volunteer hours, our friend at Wash U is going to use her love of writing to help those without a voice tell their stories, and and one of our friends is going to eradicate homelessness in St. Louis. In making space to share our stories, We create a moment that matters.

Rosh HaShana is a yoma arichta - the Aramaic for a long day. This two day holiday is considered one long day. Let's use this as an inspiration to encourage us to create moments that matter. Ones that lengthen each day.

Use this day to ask yourself- Did I create enough special moments during the past year? Which ones do I want to create this year and with whom do I want to create them? What moments will give my life meaning and purpose? What ordinary moments will I elevate and preserve on video. What Moments that matter will you create?

[\[i\]](#) The Power of Moments. Chip Heath and Dan Heath p. 65ff from Chasing Daylight by Eugene O'Kelly

ⁱ Einstein and the Rabbi: Searching for the Soul, p. 276, Naomi Levy, 2017

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