

Rabbi Rick Kellner
Yom Kippur Family Service 5770

“Slow Down”

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Some of you may remember this scene from Taxi over 30 years ago. If you don't, you can find it on You Tube. That's right we all know that a yellow light tells us to slow down and be careful. But the question is why do so many drivers speed up when they see a yellow light? Why don't they slow down, be careful and actually follow what they are supposed to do when they see a yellow light? It is because we are stuck in the fast lane. Think about it who can run the fastest, who can swim the fastest, who can do the most work the fastest, people get rewarded for finishing first. Life in the fast lane is what we have become accustomed to from homework, to our jobs, to driving, to getting from one activity to the next, TIVO speeds up our TV watching by shaving off 6 minutes for every half hour. McDonalds, Burger King, Taco Bell, we all crave fast food, you can have it your in under two minutes, we all want cars that go from 0 to 60 as fast as possible. Yes we are obsessed with speed. But now in 5770, in this new year as we think about who we are and what we hope to become, its time for each of us to figure out what it takes to slow down.

Nah, Rabbi Rick, you're wrong, its good to be fast, it's good to not waste time, think of how many more things you can get done in a day if you go faster. We all remember the famous fable of the tortoise and the hare. This is the greatest race of all time, even better than the Amazing Race or the Indy 500. You see the fast hare liked to brag about how fast he ran and he would make fun of the slow tortoise. So one day the tortoise challenged the hare to a race. The hare laughed so hard his eyes almost flew out of his head. The forest animals met and mapped out the race and when the race begun the hare took off and ran quickly out of sight. About half way through the race, the hare realized he had plenty of time to beat the slow tortoise and he decided to play in the trees and then he got so tired that he figured he could take a nap. All along the tortoise had been plodding along slowly one step at a time. The hare finally woke up from his nap and said, time to get going, I have a race to win and took off as fast as before, confident that he would win the race. As he

approached the finish line he was so proud of himself that he had beat the slow tortoise, but as he got closer and closer he saw that the tortoise stood waiting for him with a proud grin on his face. Moral of the story, slow and steady wins the race.

There are other morals to this story. The tortoise, in his slow walk through the forest, probably had an opportunity to see all of the miracles happening around him. He had time to stop and say *mah rabu maasech Adonai*. How amazing are your works God. When we slow down, we can see and appreciate the beautiful sunset or the rainbow that appears in the sky. We can take to heart what the psalmist wrote in Psalm 46 when he said, “Be still and know that I am God.” Being still or being slow, opens up new doors to appreciate a world that is speeding by around us. If we don’t slow down we might miss something amazing that happens.

If the moral of the Tortoise and the Hare is “slow and steady wins the race” then the moral of our life stories can be slow and steady is a good model for life. In recent years there has been a new model for living, it is called the slow movement. We have heard of slow food where we take the time to slowly prepare and enjoy all of our foods. Now we are being introduced to “Slow Family Living.” New York Times columnist and writer of the Motherhood blog writes, “Slow family living is about the idea of finding balance and truly connecting with each other and finding the joy in family life. Slowness is not just about slowing down and doing less, but connecting the process of being a parent or a kid with family life as a whole and it is about connecting with each individual family member as well. Slow down, connect, enjoy, it is the whole premise of the slow family movement which helps to strengthen the home and strengthen the family.”¹

There are two aspects of Slow Family Living, Slow Parenting and Being a Slow Child. Kids in the room tell me if this hypothetical child sounds like you or someone you know. Jack wakes up early in the morning and rushes off to swim practice before he goes to school. Jack spends all day at school and then after school goes to Karate, has a piano lesson, on Mondays and Wednesdays goes to soccer practice and on Tuesdays and Thursdays takes a tennis lesson at the park. The weekends begin with a trip to the soccer field, then a birthday party, a visit to a museum or a trip up the coast to a nature preserve. Every minute of Jack’s life is programmed. Jack’s parents lead very busy lives, both work and keep pretty packed schedules.

¹ Lisa Belkin, Slowfamilyliving.com/tag/lisa-belkin/

Raise your hand if this pretend Jack sounds like someone you know. One day Jack had a fit and did not want to go to Tennis practice. Jack wanted to stay at home and play in his room instead of playing tennis. Jack's mom insisted that he go. They sped across the busy streets of Los Angeles, running through yellow light after yellow light. In the back Jack had fallen asleep. That's when his mom thought, "This is crazy; I am dragging him to something he doesn't really want to go to. I'm going to burn out my child." Carl Honore tells a similar story in his book entitled *In Praise of Slowness*. The entire book teaches us about slowing down. Honore reveals that this actual family, living in London, realized that it was time to start figuring out a way to lighten the load on all of their calendars. They decided that Jack would stick to three things, soccer, swimming and drama. And what do you think happened? Jack started making crisper passes in soccer; the head of Jack's drama group feels that Jack has more energy. And perhaps most importantly, Jack and his mother are building a more meaningful relationship with one another because they are spending time together. That is what it means to go slow, we connect better and we enjoy the things we are doing more.

What do the critics say? The critics say my child has to do different activities every day so that she can be the best athlete and the best musician and the best chef around so that she can get into Harvard. The former Dean of Harvard's undergraduate program is a subscriber to the slow movement. Beginning in 2001 Dean Harry Lewis sent a letter to incoming Harvard Freshman telling them to Slow Down. Over seven pages, Lewis urged students to think twice before racing through degrees, he warns against piling on too many extra-curricula activities. Why should you play lacrosse, chair debates, organize conferences act in plays and edit a section of the school paper if you spend all the time in overdrive striving not to fall behind schedule? It's better to do fewer things and have time to make the most of them. That's right Harvard Dean Harry Lewis says, "Slow down", don't race through the yellow light remember the tortoise and the hare. Slowing down will make us better by opening up our minds and allowing us to be creative. The more we play, the more we will connect with others and the more we will enjoy.

As we listen to these stories, we may be wondering how it is possible to slow down. We could pull out our Blackberries or our iphones look at the calendars and see every minute of every day filled with appointments or places to take the kids. Well let's go ahead and take out those PDAs and then highlight Saturday, if we could change the programming I

would encourage all of us to change Saturday to Shabbat. As we look at a random Saturday we might see the soccer game or games, we might see trip to the zoo or the museum, or whatever other place appears on our calendars. This day is Shabbat; let's make it holy. I now invite each of you to write in there on your calendar Shabbat family time, make it a recurring appointment, lock it in and don't schedule anything on top of it. Judaism has built in Shabbat for the very purpose of slowing down. On Shabbat we say *Harachaman hu yanchileinu yom shekulo Shabbat u'menucha*. God may we inherit Shabbat and rest. On six days we shall hurry and rush and do all of the things we need to do but on Shabbat we rest, we slow down, we connect with our family, we make our home sacred and we enjoy our lives. Shabbat is a gift for all of us reminding us to slow down. So many of you have Shabbat practices and rituals that you have created as a family. Some of you don't turn on the television until Shabbat afternoon. Some of you make sure to have dinner together as a family on Shabbat when you can't the rest of the week. Some of you spend time together playing games or just walking around the streets of the neighborhood. These are all such great activities. They do help us to slow down connect with one another and enjoy life more.

What does a yellow light mean? Slow Down. We all need yellow lights in our lives reminding us to slow down. May we all find ways to slow down and appreciate the world around us. May we all find ways to make special connections with our families and as we enjoy our lives. And may slowing down be a gift that changes our lives for the better. Let us say amen.