PRESSING PAUSE
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Sometimes you hear a sentence, or a phrase and it just sticks with you.

That happened to me this past summer. I was having a conversation with a dear friend and colleague; he had just attended a lecture by the journalist Thomas Freedman.

He said that in the midst of a really fascinating talk about technology, modernization, global economics Freedman made the following observation:

He said, "Have you ever noticed that when you press pause on your television everything stops, but when you press pause on yourself you start to think."

That was the sentence that got me thinking. Pressing pause on your life is when you start to think.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur the two pillars of these High Holy Days present us with one of those pause moments. In fact, the symbol of the pause button with its two vertically parallel lines can represent those pillars. The space between – that's the next 10 days, the 10 days of reflection, of pause that our tradition commands us to take.

When we talk about changing our lives, we often use the analogy of a remote control. We talk of rewinding our life to a better time or fast forwarding to an anticipated future; but in my experience the remote-control button most people wish they had was a pause button. Actually, I think many parents wish they had a mute button, but I know from personal experience that button is a pipe dream.

Before we talk about the pause button, I want to unpack those other functions we often wish we had a button to control, "rewind" and "fast-forward".

Rewinding

You know that saying on your side view mirror? "Objects in mirror may be larger than they appear." I think that is true for many of us. As we move ahead in life our attention is often drawn to our rear-view mirror, to our past. Wishing we could go back and either in the words of the immortal Bruce Springsteen, relive our Glory Days, or more often address some regret that is weighing down our soul.

The attraction of being able to undo our life, rewind to a point where we were happier, when things were simpler, or we had someone in our life who is now gone is sometimes irresistible.

We feel that if only we could go back, the difficulties we currently find ourselves in would be changed and we would be able to be happy.

In other cases, we hope that we could be able to rewind so that we can undo some of the damage and hurt that we have caused to other people.

Unfortunately, the remote for your soul doesn't have this button. Human beings were never made with a rewind button, you can't go back. Equally true; to live a life filled with regret is not to truly live.

I learned this most profoundly from Bronnie Ware a hospice nurse in Australia, who spent hours by the bedsides of her patients, talking with them and listening to their stories.

In her conversations she would ask her patients, "Do you have any regrets?" They answered honestly; with the clarity that comes from knowing that their own death was near, that not only did they not have a rewind button that works, but when you are in palliative care you have no remote control at all. God is holding the remote.

Ms. Ware wrote a book about these conversations; it's title: "The Top Five Regrets of the Dying."

Before I list them – I want you to do something, and it's really the whole point of this sermon. Ask yourself, are you living the life you intended for yourself? If, and God forbid, if, you were to die today would you have any deep, personal regrets?

I don't mean what is on your Bucket List (Sky diving, travelling to some exotic local, learning to cook a good Indian curry).

My question is deeper, more personal. If you could change anything about your life before its too late what would it be?

The five most common answers that Ms. Ware heard to those questions were these:

1) I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me. Is your life in line with your values? The High Holy Days implore us to examine our lives, to look at our past year, and all of the past years and ask ourselves, "Am I being true to myself?"

I know many of us can't answer that in the affirmative. So often we live our lives in terms of what others expect of us. And for some we are not sure anymore who we are truly intended to be?

It was Shakespeare in "Hamlet" who wrote: "To thine own self be true," and the next words in the passage carry this thought further still. "And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false."

2) I wish I hadn't worked so hard.
Ware heard this regret from every male patient and every workingwoman she cared for. "They missed their children's youth and their partner's companionship." They regretted the long hours spent in the office doing some task they thought was important instead of being home for dinner, attending a child's performance or spending time with family and friends.

Clayton Christenson, is a professor at the Harvard School of Business, in his book, "How Will You Measure Your Life?" he offers a model of how to avoid this regret.

Christenson explains that IN LIFE like in business we each have limited resources: time, energy, talent and wealth. With every moment of our time, every decision about how we spend our energy, our talent and our money, we are making a statement about what really matters to us.

If the decisions you make about where to invest your blood, sweat and tears are not consistent with the person you aspire to be, you'll never become that person.

3) I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.
The first principle of language in Judaism is that it is creative. God spoke and the world came into being.

We too create by speaking and we create when we refrain from speaking. In the refraining we sometimes create regret, the things that were left unsaid, the feelings that we suppressed, the kind word that we were too angry or self-centred to give.

I guess in some ways this is also a mute button. Knowing when to hold our tongue and when to open our mouth, when to press mute and when to turn up the volume. If it was only so easy as pressing a button.

4) I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.
As we rewind the tape of our life each of us can point to one or two friendships we've unintentionally neglected when life got busy. We hope that the bonds of friendship are strong enough to endure such neglect, but they seldom are. Even the most committed friends stick around for only so long before they choose to invest their own time, energy and friendship elsewhere. When they do, the loss is ours – not there's.

5) I wish that I had let myself be happier.
The path to happiness in life and relationships is not just about finding someone who you think is going to make you happy. Its also about finding someone who **you** want to make happy, someone whose happiness is worth devoting yourself to. Bring happiness to another and I promise you will find it for yourself.

But as we well know you can't rewind your life. Its why the choices we make in the present about how we live our life and how we spend our time are so important.

Fast Forwarding

Another button the remote for your soul doesn't have is fast-forward.

I know we wish it did, that we would love to just push a button and skip past difficult circumstances into a time which we are sure will be happier, more rewarding and easier than the times we currently live in, and it can be agonizing to us that we are unable to jump forward to the future.

It's the paradox of life that we spend our childhood in a hurry to get older and we spend our later years wishing we were younger, longing for the flexibility of body and circumstance that age and responsibility have taken from us.

Even without this button sometimes it feels like life is happening in 2x or 3x speed. We are rushing so much; skipping so many important moments as we move from one to the next.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev once observed a man hurrying along the street, look neither right nor left:

"Why are you rushing so? He asked him.

"I am after my livelihood," the man replied.

"And how do you know, "continued the rabbi, "that your livelihood is running on before you, so that you have to rush after it? Perhaps it is behind you, and all you need do to encounter it is to pause and stand still."

And it's there in that beautiful teaching that we encounter the most powerful button on the Remote Control for the Soul, and actually the only button that really exists; The Pause Button.

When you press pause on yourself, you start to think.

When we take time to pause and examine what's happening to us and how we feel we can sometimes see our life in vivid detail and understand what's really going on. When we press pause on life, the process of introspection begins, and it can be both revealing and calming.

Sometimes that pause consists of moments to smell the roses, and sometimes that pause is time spent with family. Sometimes that pause consists of days spent playing, and sometimes that pause is a longer one, to heal the wounds we have sustained on our journey.

Terry Hershey writes in his book, The Power of Pause, "While striving for perfect, we pass on ordinary. While rushing for better, we don't give our best effort to good. While yearning for

new and improved, we leach the joy right out of the old and reliable." He suggests that we pause and notice those ordinary moments. They are morsels with joy hidden deep within.

These two holy days separated as they are teach us the importance of focusing attention on the "in-between" moments, the pauses between breaths, the pauses between thoughts, the pause between the end of one year and the start of another.

Those pauses are where we find our true selves.

Deep within ourselves, there is a knowing that we are at peace, not needing to look back in rewind or jump fast forward, but that we are *k'dai* we are worthy just as we are, in that moment, right now.

We are worthy of loving ourselves fully, warts and all.

Life is worthy of feeling joyful, even with all of the sad moments.

There are precious moments right in front of us that are waiting to be embraced.

When you press pause you can see them.

In her book, Radical Acceptance, Tara Brach writes, "Through the sacred art of pausing, we develop the capacity to stop hiding, to stop running away from our own experience. We begin to trust in our natural intelligence, in our naturally wise heart, in our capacity to open to what arises."

By pressing the pause button on life, we give ourselves the space to realign with our values and our vision. To reconnect with our inner voice, our true selves.

When we hit pause, we are able to freeze the frame and examine our life from every angle.

Our world is becoming one that wants to continually drive forward without thought for our own well-being. We need the next new thing, the latest update and upgrade. Life is coming at us so fast.

In this New Year, in these 10 days between the two pillars of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur –

Give yourself some breathing space.

Take a timeout.

Press pause on life. Its the only button we have, press it and see what happens. I suspect you'll start to think about all you've been doing.