

4 minutes and 33 seconds

The length of a piece of music composed by John Cage.

Titled the same

Written for any combination of instruments,  
anyone at all.

3 movements

A copy of the piece sat framed on my rabbi's wall

An homage and a silent reminder.

A blank reminder

For the piece was silent.

Silence.

4 minutes and 33 seconds

Designed for the audience member and the

Musician and the conductor alike

4 minutes and 33 seconds

Of silence.

Any sounds can constitute music

Even what we hear when we are silent.

I used to sit intrigued on the faded couch in her office

Until I asked one day what it sounded like and learned.

It sounds like this.

It sounds like music we hear when we stop making noise at all.

4 minutes and 33 seconds is a long time.

A time of weeping when grief breaks through

A pent up burst when the floodgates break.

Too long for silence sometimes.

I'm a terrible meditator because I don't slow down enough  
And sometimes I am utterly overwhelmed when I close  
The extra noise and hear the thoughts come crashing in  
The silence in my own head is loud.  
The anxiety or the fear, the acceleration of my heart and pulse.  
Sitting in silence for a moment is an eternity.  
Silent sitting is an aspirational practice for some  
A place of respite for others  
And the most nerve wracking experience for others, seeing the  
speed at which our own thoughts move.  
Feeling Swept off their feet in the waves.

A symphony needs rest to lift music out of noise  
So we need silence to lift truth out of words  
Says our prayerbook.  
It is the pauses between the notes that makes the music.  
That is where the art resides.

This night, this pause, we retreat from all work  
All food  
All bodily things  
Pause from the noise of our lives.  
And each week, even if only an hour  
A sabbath  
A shabbat  
A difference

The only night we gather to sing these melodies  
The day to express our gratitude of what is  
The only night of the week we have grape juice in my house  
A Shabbat of being and not doing  
Yet Again, with the anxiety and worry if we turn off too much  
There is always more to be busy with - can we really ever stop?  
Living by our calendars from drop off to pick up  
From errand to lunches to deadlines  
From more and more and more  
If we stopped for 4 minutes and 33 seconds  
Or even 4 and 33 moments  
Would it all come crashing down around us  
As we fear  
Or as we need  
Would it help?  
What would we hear?

I think of how many times we are working  
And simply when we are awake  
when we need to think  
To write or to process  
To pause and not plow through the inbox  
And we pick up our phones  
Press play  
Scroll through mindlessly  
Look around the room to remember what else needs doing  
Multitask as we cook and eat and meeting  
Use the noise of the moment to muffle  
And then keep moving, skimming  
Head above water.

Rest comes once a week and we call it Shabbat  
Rest comes once a year and we call it Yom Kippur  
Rest comes once every 7 years and we call it Shmita

Shmita

Every 7 years the land must lie fallow

No planting, no reaping

Welcome the rot

Welcome the rest

So that the seeds and the roots break down and regenerate

Every 7 years is a Shabbat of the land for God

Every 7 years the Torah teaches we let the whole earth turn to  
compost

Re-enrich itself by doing nothing.

This is the Shmita year, 5782.

How can we possibly rest?

Not only Shabbat.  
Not only Yom Kippur  
Not only this Shmita year.

How might rest come every day?  
Sleep is 1/60th of death teaches the Talmud.  
Not a complete ending, but a necessary pause.  
Because a complete rest  
Permanent stopping  
Eternal sleep  
Death  
Is not the goal  
Despite the fact that on Yom Kippur we rehearse for it.  
Wearing white, abstaining, all as basic as when we are buried.

Slowing - not stopping - some of the parts of us  
Terrified of what we will hear  
Frightened of what we will feel in the quiet  
What if we feel too much  
What if we don't feel anything?  
What terrible things will our imagination bring?  
What will consume us in the waves and will we be pulled under  
What we cannot see and how can we trust  
That stopping does not mean ending  
That slowing  
That dormancy  
Does not mean death?

But what if we slowed down, and let ourselves discover what's  
really there, instead of what we fear?  
What might we feel that is new  
and good?

How in this second year of pandemic life can we Slow down  
Sustaining ourselves  
Until we can restore  
If not me, who?  
If not now, when?

Your battery is running low  
Your connection is unstable  
You are muted.

These are the phrases  
The literal phrases  
That flash and beep and signal  
And yell above the abyss  
SLOW DOWN  
Stop. Change something.  
Disconnect.  
Reconnect.  
Restart.  
Recharge.

The way we move through trauma  
Is to touch and feel and remember  
The deep stores that we do have inside  
And if we don't have them someone might have extra.  
Like how there are always enough  
Tissues at a funeral.  
What we need in the moment.

To remind ourselves that amidst the weeds  
There are seeds that are rotting  
To prepare to germinate again.  
The things we can hold onto outside and inside.  
The beauty that lives beside the chaos in the silence.  
If only we give ourselves permission to put on the brakes  
Enough

Shmita is a sabbatical, a release, a stepping away and slowing  
down  
We stop the planting and the growing cycle  
But we don't starve.  
We rely on the stores we have, because we have prepared.  
This year, and for years past, we built up food, capacity,  
Learning.  
Now, in the second marathon  
The second wave of the pandemic  
Is the time for us to stop and open up those reserves  
Like the lean years Joseph dreamt.

It is a tikkun to the voices and forces that push us into an  
unending cycle of  
More and more  
Of have and greed  
Of hierarchy and need and judgment.  
Shmita is a shofar blast to remind us that more and more is not  
better  
But that more and more will overcome us  
Until we cannot produce  
Cannot sustain.

Shmita is for the land, for the earth, for our climate  
And it demands our rest.  
For the images of clearer city skies during quarantine because the  
pollution subsided  
have not been enough to compel us against the urge to re-enter  
with urgency.  
To be more creative  
To be more adaptive  
To be more productive  
To do it all and then some  
More.  
We cannot manipulate the too limited resources so that we have  
More.  
For we will burn out.  
More.

There is a reason that the noise is constant.  
The pollution of too many thoughts  
Too many things that need taking care of  
Too many decisions to make.  
Too much to do at once.  
The very systems of our culture - how we relate, how we  
consume, how we produce, how we evaluate and judge  
Is based on the drive for more.  
The more we can do the stronger we must be.  
We continue to play the instruments all at once.  
Forgetting that the purpose of a sabbatical is to leave  
And then return after the break  
Recharged, able to access new skills and new energy.

After a year of forced shutdown we hardly shut down.  
And now, just as that year rolls into another one  
We are pushed forward to keep going  
And we never recovered from the last one.  
No sick days or days off.  
Just took the next steps forward in the second push that started  
just after we celebrated the first one's end, a few deep breaths in  
June and July, and wanted to collapse into comfort.  
But no collapse. And no comfort.

The answer we know is to rest  
I have been told that I have two speeds: off and on  
This Shmita year  
My kavannah is not to stop completely but to find a new speed.  
Not to be silent for 4 minutes and 33 seconds  
(I fear it would take a whole lot more than that)  
But to slow down.

My hope is to taste food again  
Actually be present while eating it and not move through a meal  
on the way to something else  
My hope is to drink water  
Feel when I am thirsty and not reach for more caffeine  
Take a break when it is sunny and walk around the block instead  
of squeezing in one more errand.  
Sit in the parking lot between meetings, not run into Target for  
one more something.  
Slowing down to enjoy each thing more  
Not creating more things to enjoy  
Slowing down is collaborating, delegating  
Giving away more, and sharing.  
Slowing down  
Savoring  
Exhaling, the kind that feels natural, not the kind that emerges in  
a gust after we realize we didn't even realize that we've been  
holding in our breath.

**Starting with 33 seconds together.  
Right Now.**

## How do we slow down this year?

I learned from a Pastor:

*“We look down at our blistered aching feet, our hopeful but exhausted heart, our overwhelmed but determined mind, and we take a step forward into life as a gathered community once again. Why?”*

***Because our world doesn't know how to stop.”***

*Maybe the answer is to **stop running the second race.***

*What if we looked at each other and gently nodded.*

*Slowed our forced jog.*

*And started walking.*

*Together.*

***What if we walked our second marathon?***

*Side by side. No racing. No competing with anything or anyone.*

*Resting when it's time to rest.*

*Saying yes to a new idea when it glistens with possibility.*

*Saying no when something feels too heavy.*

*Asking new questions in places we assumed the old answer.*

*Giving others permission to rest because we choose rest.*

*Questioning the speed at which we live and move.*

*Loving our people with beautiful boundaries in place.*

*Taking a nap.*

*Going to therapy and spiritual direction because we're humans*

*Breathing deeply of God's grace and love and restoration.*

*Maybe this is how we disrupt the deeply ingrained oppressive realities of our world.*

*We choose to walk.*

*Together.*

I have read this sermon by Pastor Jenny Smith over and over and over.

Because I don't think I know how to slow down either.

But I really really want to.

This is my version of Hineni.

The liturgy that the cantor sings tomorrow morning, ascending the stairs in the sunlight

Carrying the prayers and the needs of all of us in his arms

Lying flat before the open ark

Baring all.

I need you. We need each other.

Because we will live with this virus forever

Because if we make this pandemic pace our new normal we will burn our land and our sustenance and ourselves.

Because our batteries are running low.

Our connections are unstable.

And the noise of the world is too loud.

*Here's to the second marathon. I'm with you, friends.*

*I'll be over in the slow walkers crew that laughs and takes a lot of breaks.*

*Want to join me?*

---

*Rabbi Rachel Weiss*

*Kol Nidre 5782*