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**“January Series 1: Time”**

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The point of this demonstration as I said before is not to say that no matter how busy you are, you can always squeeze one more thing in. That is the efficiency school of time management. Efficiency is trying to get as many things done as possible. You might try multi-tasking and being busy from morning until night using odd moments for some kind of productive purpose. The efficiency school of time management leads to burnout. It leads to an unbalanced life. It can lead to rupture in your relationships. It can lead to a desert in your spiritual life. It can lead to loneliness. It may lead to more money, but maybe not. There have been some studies that have shown that while people think that multi-tasking makes them get more things done, actually, they don't get things done as efficiently as if they were to do one thing first and then another, because the distraction keeps you from getting things done.

I want to talk to you about time management for effectiveness and not efficiency. Effectiveness means that you do the right things. Efficiency you do more things. Effectiveness means you do the right things and that means you have a balanced life, to take care of yourself physically, to take care of the people you love, the community you live in, your spirit and soul, and have a little fun while you are here to enjoy the gift of life, the important things. As we saw by the demonstration, if you don't put the big rocks in first, the little stuff will take up all the room. The big rocks are the important things, not necessarily the urgent things. Those urgent things can be tiny rocks and grains of sand and water that just makes a mess of everything. Try to fit those big rocks if you put all the gravel, sand, and water in first; it just won't happen and your life will be a mess. Trust me.

So what are the important things? Quality time with our partner, with our friends, with our children. Time to attend to our spiritual growth. Time to serve a community that is crying out for it, not out of guilt but out of joy to be able to offer your particular unique gifts to a world that is crying out for those gifts. You'll have time for those, if you schedule the big rocks first. Time to exercise. Time to learn something new. Time to do the things that bring you joy.

So, when you look at the week that's coming up (do this this afternoon) schedule the big rocks first and then all the other stuff that you have to do. Steven Covey, who is the guru of effective as opposed to efficient time management, says that this is a principle called “First Things First,” and it is the most important lesson that we need to learn if we are going to have a healthier relationship to time. There are four kinds of ways of using time, four kinds of things to do. The first is things that are both important and urgent. The other word for those is “emergencies,” gotta do it now, it's really important, everything else has to wait. Covey says that we could have fewer emergencies in our lives if we planned, if we scheduled the big rocks first. That is the second quadrant, important but not urgent, and planning is in there as well as the other things I've talked about which are the meat and core and tofu of life for you

vegetarians. This is where life takes its meaning. But, you know, you can put off time with your friends until you don't have them anymore. You can put off spending time with your children until suddenly it becomes urgent that you spend time with them. You can put off time to cultivate your spiritual growth until all of a sudden you wonder what your life means. So schedule the big rocks first. Then there are other tasks that are urgent, but if you look at them they're not important. There is the tyranny of the urgent that keeps us from doing what's important. What could be urgent but not important? Other people's lack of planning could be one. Your inability to say no to other people's priorities that might not have been well thought out. Stuff that has to do with our consumer lifestyle often seems urgent, but are not important. When you think about every second and every minute of your time is precious and irreplaceable; it's your one life as far as we know. And then there is stuff that's not urgent and not important. Ideally, of course, we'd never do any of that stuff. We spend on average as Americans 40% of our free time watching tv and we complain that we don't have enough time to exercise or take care of our spiritual well-being. The problem is that if you spend all of your day dealing with urgent and non-important things, all you're going to want to do is veg out in front of the tube, maybe even with a drink or five. That's the most important thing, putting first things first. If we don't do that, we risk frittering our life away and it happens with daily decisions and weekly decisions that we make about time.

The second thing is that we make our lives unnecessarily complicated. That has mostly to do with our relationship with stuff. Bringing any kind of stuff into your life is going to bring one level or another of complication into your life because it takes up psychic space, not just garage space. Stuff has to be maintained. You have to wonder about how you're going to use stuff when you're busy working so that you can get more stuff when you don't even have time to play with the stuff you have. Then we have the Rummage Sale. I talked about that as a spiritual discipline, but I bought more stuff at the Rummage Sale. So, okay, it's so much more complicated because now you've got to have these coupons and memberships and keeping track of saving twenty-five cents on mayonnaise. Maybe that's quadrant four, maybe we really need to look at whether keeping track of our stuff should have such a high priority in our lives. Simplifying our lives, making them less complicated is good for the planet too, not just for our own inner and spiritual ecology.

The third most important thing to remember about our relationship with time was suggested in a book called *The Tao of Time* by Diana Hunt and Pam Tait and that is to give up the illusion that we can control time. We can only control time so far. There is something mysterious about time; it has its own flow. You know this. You have days when you just tear through everything on your to-do list and you feel great about it. Those are the plus days and you give yourself a pat on the back, "I'm so effective. I'm so efficient." Then there are days when you end the day with more things on your to-do list than you started with. Those days happen. Does anybody have days where that doesn't happen? That's part of the natural flow of time too, so it's not something you did. To be flexible and know that time has its own rhythms and to decelerate, because it's not all under your control, to live in the moment, to trust that there will be time for the important stuff.

The fourth most important thing about time is to take time out of your day to forget about time because strictly speaking the only thing that exists is this moment. The past is a memory in this moment. The future is a hope or a fear in this moment. This moment is eternity. This moment is all there is. To take time during the day to notice, three breaths every time the phone rings. A non-cigarette break in the morning and a non-cigarette break in the afternoon while your co-workers are freezing outside, to just be and smile and breathe and see and hear. An office vacation, getting up and walking around, taking your lunch outside, walking to some place nice, enjoying the sunshine and the air, coming back to the present moment, there are so many ways to do that.

The fifth most important thing about time, and this sounds contradictory, is to schedule spontaneous time. The way our lives are right now we need to schedule spontaneous time. Often, in working with couples whose marriages need work all the advice they need is to schedule one night away from their home pressure and away from their children to be with each other and enjoy their company, a date night, where they're free of any other obligation but to do what they want to do together as a couple. It can work miracles on a relationship. I read a study somewhere (I'd like to track this down and see if it's an urban legend) that the average couple spends twenty minutes a week talking to each other. Another ancient tradition that recognizes this truth is the tradition of the Sabbath, one day a week where you don't do anything on your to-do list, one day of the week when you aren't manipulating the world, engineering, leveraging, molding, but resting, worshipping, enjoying the world.

The final thing to recommend about a healthy relationship to time is to take some time to get away in nature. We are animals. We are part of the natural world. Yes, we are herd animals, social animals, we need each other, but we also need to feel the wind and the sun, the earth under our feet, the smell of the vegetation, the sound of the ocean, the birds, the frogs, the breeze. It's hard for me to imagine being healthy without a regular dose of the natural world. Unitarian Universalist family therapist, Mary Pipher recommends that families in trouble take time to do something playful together in nature. The reason that she does that is she doesn't know a single family or a single person that doesn't have the best family memory around something that their family did together outside. This is very important and often forgotten and I do believe that one of the reasons that we are wasting this earth is because of an alienation of affection. Just as we neglect our relationships with our partners, children, and friends, we neglect our relationship with our mother earth to our peril.

I want to close with these words from the Vietnamese Zen Master, Thich Naht Hahn:  
*We are very good at preparing to live, but not very good at living. We know how to sacrifice ten years to get a diploma and we are willing to work very hard to get a job, a car, a house, and so on, but we have difficulty remembering that we are alive in the present moment, the only moment that there is for us to be alive.*

Blessed be. Namaste.