

It's About time

We all make use of it, but most of us don't know a whole lot about it: time. Here are some important thoughts. Find the home site of author Bill Allin at [http: billallin.com](http://billallin.com)

For most of human history since the dawn of the agrarian age (about 12,000 years ago) our ancestors looked outside their homes in the morning, checked the sky and thought *OK, I can do this task today (or I can't because the weather's not right)*. Though they had sundials and clocks existed in some places, most people told the time by the sun, or by the fact that they were hungry. And checking the weather meant looking up.

Today many of us check the weather forecast first thing after we put the morning coffee on, even though the chance of weather preventing us from doing most of the task we want to accomplish in a day is very small. We check the weather as if it might affect our whole future.

Time surrounds us, with clocks in every room and watches on our wrists. Though a few of us can still tell the time of day within a few minutes by the location of the sun, most of us don't have to look up to tell the time because we have checked a clock or our watch within a previous few minutes.

Time is so important to us that we speak of life ticking away, of each succeeding year seeming to be shorter, of our personal schedule (daytimer or PDA) being what keeps us on track to get done everything we have planned. We even have pithy saying such as "Time is money" that encourages us to avoid wasting time.

According to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, we use the word "time" more than any other noun in the language. "Year" holds third place, with "day" coming in fifth and "week" seventh.

Although we invented the concept of time (no other living thing uses our system of timekeeping), it's not really a fixed thing. An hour spent waiting in a doctor's waiting room seems endless, whereas an hour spent enjoying the company of a loved one passes like lightning. In one experiment at UCLA, researchers rang a bell after test subjects had sat in silence for 53 seconds. Healthy-brained people thought that 67 seconds had passed, while those who were wired on stimulants such as caffeine thought that 91 seconds had elapsed.

In another experiment, the researchers found that people with a healthy brain who stared at a photo of an angry person for five seconds thought that more time had passed than if they looked at a picture of a neutral face.

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reports that nostalgia--remembering times past--may be healthy. Reliving pleasant, happy or exciting events of the past can give our spirits a lift. Loyola University Chicago researchers found that thinking of good memories for 20 minutes a day can make people more cheerful and happier than if they think of their present lives. Most people don't indulge in such reverie. They don't have time.

Our media do everything they can to make us unhappy, even depressed about the condition of our lives and the state of the world in present times. Television news almost always reports bad news. Can you remember a newspaper ever reporting that we are living in good times? Newspapers always tell us that some times in the past were better--indeed, were good times--but never that the present times are good and rarely that the future will be better. The media thrive on presenting items that, if taken out of the context of the rest of our lives, would be depressing.

Alas, nostalgia for the good times of the past deceives us. The past was never better, in total. The present is never as bad as it seems, unless we persist in focussing on the negative parts of reality while ignoring the good parts. What we persist in seeing in the present is what we believe is the condition of our life and of the world in the present. If we believe the dark news the media presents, we will believe that the world is getting worse. Despite the evidence that the world today is a much better and healthier place than it has been for humans ever before.

Can we slow down the pace of our life? According to author James Gleick in his book *Faster*, "The historical record

shows that humans have never, ever opted for slower." However, that claim is deceptive. Humans of the past had little option in most cases to slow down the pace of their lives because they spent almost every waking moment trying to earn a living to support a family (or to provide for one at home) and to survive the hardships of life as it was in their time. Today most of us spend time entertaining ourselves, though we claim to not have enough time to do it justice.

Our ancestors, in most cases, could not afford to slow down. We can. Much of the rush of our lives exists because we have adopted so many interests and responsibilities, often more than we can manage comfortably. If we give up those activities and responsibilities we have adopted because we believed someone else's claim that they made life better, more interesting, more worthwhile, we could devote ourselves to actually making our lives more rewarding.

Is it necessary that we commit so much of our life to time-oriented pursuits? We invented time and we invented the belief that time is critically important, that being late is a grievous mismanagement of time, that procrastination is bad and that so much of our time must be filled with *doing something* that we believe our own creations.

We should each rethink our commitment to a lifestyle oriented around time. We can't avoid some things related to time, such as our jobs. We can consider how devoted we must be to living a lifestyle proposed for us by people who have something to gain (usually a financial one) by having us centre our life around time.

For one thing, getting enough sleep is important to how we view the world and the life we live. So many people deprive themselves of so much sleep over a long period of time that they suffer from some symptoms of sleep deprivation. Those symptoms ensure that we can never be truly happy about our life. Get a good night's sleep every night and the world seems like a much better and more manageable place each morning.

Take the time. If the world and your life looks better as a result, it was worth the investment.

Bill Allin

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