



LUKENOTES

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Timeshifting

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On a recent trip to Manchester, England, to work in our Saint Luke Centre program, my travel arrangements included a seven-hour layover. Everyone I mentioned this to groaned. Knowing I had all this "time to kill," I took a light backpack as my only carry-on. I had no other plans except lunch. When I arrived at my interim destination, I decided to take a hike and discovered the airport was arranged in a big circle. I set off. An airport chapel sign sparked my curiosity and I made a mental note to return. The endless long corridors were perfect for walking, and I stopped anywhere that caught my attention. I watched a huge moving art sculpture as it completed the nine minute complete revolution through the lifts, drops, rolls and obstacles. I found two cards that were just right for friends and wrote them waiting for lunch. I had time to eat mindfully, since I had all the time in the world. On my return circuit, I stopped by the chapel and discovered that Mass was about to start. People began to arrive, greeting each other and the priest like friends and family. Although I had expected a few strangers stopping for a quiet moment or quick prayer, it became apparent that this airport chapel housed a vibrant parish of regulars who lived nearby. The pastor's energy and enthusiasm clearly nourished the parishioners, and the spirit in the community spread readily to visitors. What an unexpected delight! When it came time to board my plane, I felt renewed, as after a day of reflection.

I recognize my airport "retreat" as an experience of *timeshifting*, as described by Stephan Rechtschaffen in his 1996 book of that title. He describes "entrainment" as the process by which rhythms fall into synchronization with each other, specifically the tendency for our own rhythms to fall into sync with the pace of the world around us. In modern society this pace is FAST. We move quickly, eat quickly, work quickly and play quickly. Most of us note that the pace is exhausting, while we continue to run as fast as we can to "get it all done." We "relax" with fast-paced TV shows, computer games or surfing the net-activities that continue the unrelenting pace. We approach most days with unrealistic "to do" lists. Day's end brings satisfaction at seeing items checked off or disappointment if expectations are not met. Possible moments of surprise and wonder are missed, and the unexpected is considered a distraction to be avoided. With multi tasking we try to accomplish even more. Time management courses teach us to turn "up the speed on the treadmill of our lives."

Rechtschaffen recommends that we re-learn how to rest by paying attention to our own rhythms, especially noticing that our bodies and emotions operate in a range of rhythms, not at just one pace. We can learn to step out of our automatic entrainment to society's pace and slow down. *Timeshifting*, -the capacity to consciously shift our rhythm - begins with attending to the

present moment. The next step is to use all our senses to become aware of what is happening in us and around us. Then we are free to choose to shift our rhythm to what the moment dictates or to stay with a different rhythm. The goal is not always to replace going quickly with going slowly, but to be aware of our rhythm and the choices we make. Going fast when things need to be done quickly and "downshifting" to a slower pace to relax make it possible to function without being enslaved by society's pace.

In an accelerated paced world, thoughts and reactions are quick. Slowing down, however, is crucial for experiencing our emotions or making meaningful contact with others. It takes time to become aware of feelings and to experience them fully. Rechtschaffen says "serenity only exists when time moves slowly." One of the effects of our busyness is that we don't have time to feel, especially to feel pain. Avoiding emotional pain unconsciously reinforces our high-speed lives. Ask several people to sit still and do nothing for a few minutes and notice their responses: "I can't do that; I'd feel guilty about all I need to do," or "it makes me nervous and I have to get up." With enough speed, we can temporarily avoid the pain, but we also miss the opportunity for serenity. When we allow ourselves to experience emotion without taking action, the painful feeling gradually subsides. As we become more present, it is as if the moment expands and there is room for us to be surprised and delighted by the beauty and wonders around us. Healing involves experiencing the feelings that we run from in order to learn the lessons they teach about how we are living our lives and what we truly need.

Rechtschaffen talks about creating timeshifting rituals or opportunities for increasing awareness of the moment. Almost anything we choose- listening to music, an external cue such as the ringing of the phone, slowing at the beginning of a meal, pausing for a few breaths, scheduling unplanned time - can remind us to come into the present moment.

On my return trip through the same airport, a planned 45- minute layover was delayed for another hour. The magic of my last visit was gone as I experienced the wait as dull and frustrating. I had re-entrained with society's rapid pace. I was "waiting for my plane" rather than "being open to the moment." The good news is that I noticed the difference. I know that *timeshifting* is always one present moment away and wonders are there to be discovered. I can choose to transform "time to kill" into time to live more fully in the present. This is particularly important to understand as we gear up for Fall's increased activity. *Timeshifting* would advocate a balance of different paces, so that we experience the rich journey of our lives as we move toward our goals.

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