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Like many Jewish people in Atlanta, I have been a synagogue member for many years, but did not attend services on a regular basis until the last 10 years. My mom passed away 10 years ago, and I wanted to honor her life by saying Kaddish as often as possible. During these last 10 years, I believe my insight into and understanding of Judaism has grown dramatically. I now believe that by not attending services regularly during the prior ten years, I have been cheating myself.
Maybe you have also been cheating yourself.
Like many, I felt that I did not have the time for synagogue; there were more important matters. I have come to learn that a break from our daily routine enhances the soul, enriches the spirit, and improves our relationships. In a sense, you create more life by redirecting your thoughts and energy to a spiritual level. I have come to learn that by living in accordance with Jewish values and principles, you are more likely to grow into a stronger, happier, more empowered, more successful person in many aspects of life, including family, friends, community, and commerce. And you can become an individual with a more meaningful life, better able to deal with the tough times we all encounter (think of Joseph sitting in prison all those years, yet he continued to have faith in God even when his faith in people had been shattered).
As a result of attending services regularly, I have come to believe that the Torah, the Great Books, and Judaism provide guidance in three major ways;

1. Who and What We Are

Each of us is a miracle created by God in His image, imbued with a soul, a spirit, and a connection to our Heavenly Father. On another level, we are destined to work and toil in a physical, unforgiving material world that has been largely created by humans.

2. Who God Is

Our creator, Creator of the world, Our Heavenly Father, Our Rock, Our Redeemer, Our Provider, Our Hope when all hope seems to be lost. Our Constant Companion, quick to forgive, always loving us. We pray each day to thank God for all He has provided. We take too much for granted and need to be reminded daily how fortunate we are.

- You put a seed in the ground, and a tree grows.
- You arise each day but do not appreciate the thousands of things that can malfunction in your body.
- You are injured, and you heal.
- The earth revolves around the sun in a predictable manner. If it were to vary by a few degrees all life on earth would cease.
- God protects and provides for us in so many ways—too numerous to count.

3. How We  Can Live an Empowered, Harmonious Life

The two prior points were easy; you only had to deal with God. God is loving, understanding, and forgiving; people, in too many cases, are not. The greatest challenge we all face is dealing with others in an imperfect, self-centered, material world. Humans have lived in organized societies for eons, and it has been largely beneficial. But all good things have some disadvantages; in this case, some people can be unpleasant, difficult, or dangerous. Judaism offers guidance for dealing with such people. Some examples include:

- Don’t steal from others; chances are good they will get upset and steal from you or worse.
- Don’t tell falsehoods about others; they might seek revenge.
- Be slow to anger if someone commits an offence against you.
- Be slow to assume ill of others; often, we rush to judgment without all the facts.
- Do not hold resentment against others; it diverts your energy and makes you less effective.

I believe that the guidelines in the Torah and the Great Books serve to enhance, enrich, and empower our lives and moderate the pain of tough times. We are empowered with attitudes, principles, and skills that allow us to travel through life with more joy, more success, more friendships, and less hate.

Aside from these macro insights, other benefits I have gained by attending services regularly include the following:

- I know the service much better, and my Hebrew has really improved.
- I feel a part of a larger community.
- I have met some wonderful people and have shared important moments in their lives.
- I have seen some beautiful children grow and become wonderful adults, including my own two daughters.
- I have seen some wonderful people pass from this world to the next with grace, humility, understanding, and love

In addition to trying to get “the big things right,” I believe we can each add, on a daily basis, a sweet touch to the lives of others; a few of my favorite ways are there:

- Offer a kind word of praise and a “thank you” for being a friend.
- When you are in a position of authority, bend the rules a bit for someone else who is trying to advance through life.
- Don’t forget that others gave you a break, so pass it on to someone else—maybe a young person.
- Don’t be bound by rules— be ruled by hope, compassion, and friendship.
- Allow the driver who is handling a big rig a little time and room to make the turn.
- Let another driver into the flow of traffic, wave a thank you to the driver who allows you into traffic.
- Replace road rage with road love.

When I was a young man starting my professional career I worked with a much older CPA; he often said “every day is a holiday, and every meal a banquet;” what a wonderful way to see life.

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