# Start Strong...Stay Strong: Thoughts for Parashat Tsav

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Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Tsav

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In 2014, three scholars from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania published an important paper on the science of timing—how temporal landmarks impact on the way we organize our lives. Hengchen Dai, Katherine Milkman and Jason Riis studied eight and a half years of Google searches for the word "diet." Searches for this word always soared about 80% on January 1 of each year. They also found that searches spiked at the start of every month and every first day of the week. (Discussion of their research is from Daniel Pink's book, *When.*)

In their later research, these scholars found that people activate new beginnings on days that have special meaning. When they framed March 20 as the first day of spring, the date offered a more effective fresh start than simply identifying it as the third Wednesday of the month. Feelings of renewal also applied to birthdays, anniversaries, or dates connected with a particular event in people's lives.

There seems to be a clear tendency for people to like "fresh starts." However, just as there is a spike of optimism and resolve at temporal starting points, there is also a steady slackening off with the passage of time.

Temporal landmarks energize and renew us; the challenge is to maintain our enthusiasm and optimism as time wears on. One of the ways to move forward is to draw on many such dates so that we frequently feel the impetus of fresh starts.

The Jewish calendar offers us moments of renewal each Shabbat. There is a holiday or fast day almost every month of the year. We are about to celebrate Pessah, the festival of redemption and renewal.

The genius of Judaism is that it seeks to energize and renew us on a daily basis—not just on calendrical landmarks.

This week's Torah reading focuses on the offerings that were brought in the Mishkan—the Israelites' sanctuary while they were in the wilderness. The Mishkan's service took place daily. This practice was followed during the period of Solomon's Temple as well as the Second Temple era. With the destruction of the Temples of antiquity, the synagogue undertook to maintain the daily service.

The Shulhan Arukh opens with this statement: "One should strengthen like a lion to arise in the morning to serve the Creator." Each morning, one needs to renew the commitment to serve the Almighty, to think about the challenges of the new day.

A good start is to devote time each morning to prayer. The daily ritual is more than a recitation of holy words; it is a way of connecting ourselves to the higher meaning of our lives. It is a way of staying in focus and of maintaining the ongoing adventure of life without sinking into a life of bland routine.

Scholars have found that many people have optimistic and energizing starts…but they often cannot follow through on their good intentions. Daily prayer each morning can help us start strong…and stay

strong.

Angel for Shabbat