



MAKING TIME IN A TIMELESS AGE

by Stephen Denham

"IF YOU WANT something done, ask a busy person to do it. The more things you do, the more you can do." Lucille Ball

If this well known quote from popular American actress and TV star, Lucille Ball, has stood the test of time—more than 20 years—today's 'busy person' should be a model of productivity, expanding ever-new frontiers in terms of what we can do and achieve. This may be true for some of us, but what most of us are experiencing in our professional and personal life appears to be something quite different.

Today's ever-advancing technology enables us to do things that even not so long ago were impossible— and for things that were possible, to do them in a fraction of time. Clearly, we can do much more, more easily, and faster than ever before, but has any of this translated into an improved quality of life for us at work and play, for our families and friends?

We live in a timeless age. Not so much in the sense of beauty, or some kind of artistic renaissance or evolution of human consciousness— but definitely in the sense that we literally have no time. We say we have no time because we are so busy. Our busyness has become a cliché for life in the 21st century; it's the condition of modern men and women.

Life is, by definition, time. To have life, is to have time. To say you have no time, therefore, is a serious capitulation. It is tantamount to saying you have no life. The truth is, we do have time – but in this day and age we find ourselves working longer hours, burdened by unwieldy workloads

at both work and home; and, as a result, struggling to find time for ourselves and our loved ones, for each other, for the things that, in our heart of hearts, we believe are most important.

Perhaps surprisingly, in this milieu of speed-driven, space-compromised, time-poor living, there are few signs of recognition that this might be a time of crisis. Passive consumerism is nothing new – but in today's climate of accelerating change, impacting upon every aspect of our professional and personal life, surely we need to find more efficient ways to manage the wave of information that now demands our attention 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

How can we manage time better today? You can't work with something you don't have. We need to make time before we can learn to use it better. So what does 'making time' mean for us today?

Our timelessness is essentially a mental phenomenon. When we are busy— too busy— we are essentially caught up in our mental stocktaking of, and about everything we have to do (e.g., "These things have to be done" or "I am the only person who can do the things I need to do"). Of course there are physically based addictions and compulsive behaviour too— but underlying these problems there is usually a strong habitual thought pattern of some kind. This justifies how busy we are, and makes change difficult.

Not surprisingly, the way to break free of this mental prison we have constructed for ourselves is to find ways to direct our attention away from our habitual stream of

thoughts, opinions and attitudes.

Step out of the habitual thinking that guides your behaviour and you've taken the first step toward change.

As another famous saying goes, 'seek and you shall find'. If you decide to pursue it, you will find there are many ways to achieve this, to get out of your head and open yourself to experiences of another whole dimension of life – presence, inspiration, grace, centredness, openness, surrender, silence, creativity, peace.

Some of these practices go back thousands of years – Eastern meditation, yoga, deep breathing, mantras and affirmations. Western psychology too has much to offer when it comes to handling stress and burnout, offering ways to slow down or stop; and group work where sharing one's innermost fears and attitudes with others becomes a powerful tool of transformation.

This 'making time' we sorely need today might be described as a cultivating of stillness— choosing from among the many ways and means available to us, both ancient and modern. There is a key element which most of these practices have in common: the breath. Learning to become aware of your breath is an integral part of stilling your mind and living in the present, experiencing life from moment to moment.

Stillness is not an escape. Cultivating stillness each day does not require you to retreat from life, although you may do this to get started or from time to time to rejuvenate. You can learn to breathe with awareness in any and every situation or

moment of your waking life, and, in the stillness that flows from that, respond to life's demands and situations with a new sense of balance, clarity and meaning.

The busy person described by Lucille Ball was no doubt creatively stimulated and engaged, able to multitask and maximise productivity. But two decades ago there were buffers of time and space that we don't have today – the personal computer and the internet were in their infancy, social media as we now know it did not exist and the commercially driven information assault of our senses was nowhere near as sophisticated or intrusive. By comparison, the busy person of 2012 is typically on overload, running on empty, teetering at the brink of exhaustion, mentally over stimulated, crying out that they have no time.

So if you want something done today, it may be wiser to ask someone who has recognised the value of practising stillness, who is able to separate themselves from both the busy world around them and the ceaseless mental flow of their own thoughts and associations— and so has time to focus on quality and detail.

If enough of us begin to cultivate an inner stillness on a daily basis, we can also begin the process of reclaiming the timelessness we have all but lost today, which once belonged to great cultures and civilisations of the past. This is the timelessness that represents the potential we each have to open ourselves to the eternal and become creators in our own right.