

WHEN AND THEN

When I lose twenty pounds, then I'll be happy.

When I firm my up my abs, then I'll plan that beach vacation.

When the holidays are over, then I'll go back to the gym.

When I can get back to my goal weight, then I'll get involved in that group.

Do you ever have thoughts like these?

I sure do. Sometimes it feels overwhelming—the list of things I *could* or *should* do for my body to make my life “better” never ends....

I should eat kale, not leftover candy.

I could exercise more.

I should switch to all organic cosmetic products . . .

The list is never satisfied.

So, I retreat to a world all my own. It's a magical place that only exists in my head.

I call it *When-Then Land*.

Oh, it's so much better than a Disney Park. *When-Then Land* is where *my* dreams come true. Within its borders, I'm a “better” version of myself—which somehow makes everything else in life instantly better, too.

Plus, this idyllic future's existence only depends on one person: Me. ***When*** *I can just accomplish this thing, ***then*** my life will improve.*

Of course, this thinking doesn't restrict itself to my body image. Other life issues can send me to *When-Then Land* too. For example:

When my kids can potty themselves, then life will be easier.

When I get a new job, then I'll feel better about myself.

When I can be a better wife, then I'll have a great marriage.

There's nothing wrong with having goals, right?

Yet, while *When-Then Land* appears to be a safe place, it's filled with robbers—vandals that steal without us even realizing it.

Allow me to explain.

I stopped by *When-Then Land* earlier today. It was such a quick trip; I didn't even have to pack snacks. The journey proceeded as follows:

Thought: It's time for us to get a new family photo taken.

Second thought: “*When* I can lose a few pounds, *then* I will schedule the pictures.”

Express train to When-Then Land now arriving on platform three.

Should I choose to stay in *When-Then Land*, I’ll never schedule those family pictures. The resident thieves convince me that I’ll look better in the future—I’ll be happier then and like the pictures more. In doing so, they rob me of the chance to capture the memory of the way my family looks now, today.

And that’s the biggest downside to living in *When-Then Land*. **We miss out on the Here-Now.**

Our mental visits to *When-Then Land* keep us from living life to the full.

In fact, the very existence of *When-Then Land* makes enjoying the *Here-Now* even more difficult because of the pressure we put ourselves under to accomplish the goals that will take us to this ideal place.

The burden of this is too big to carry. Trying to lose that weight, tone that body, be our “best” or just be “good enough” every day, in a vain attempt to make the future “better”, rates as difficult as carrying an overstuffed diaper bag while running a marathon.

So how do we escape the temptation to dwell in *When-Then Land*?

How do we take the pressure off and dwell in the *Here-Now*?

Here are two places to start.

- We often live in *When-Then Land* because we believe a lie. That is: life would be better, happier, more joyful, easier, or freer **if we had that thing** we want—be it a better body, a better marriage, or even to be more self-sufficient.

The expectation that we’ll love our lives **When-Then** we reach those goals is looking for true salvation in a place we’ll never find it.

- **Be Thankful.** Try to savor the *Here-Now*. The easiest way to do that is through practicing gratitude. No, not every day here on earth will be awesome. Struggles and pain are real. But, having an attitude of thankfulness can change our perspective on the *Here-Now* and keep us from mentally drifting into believing a future here on earth will be anyway more magical.

Write down what you are thankful for. Practice thanking Hashem for His great blessings when you pray. If you still feel yourself constantly drifting into that fantasyland, watch your media consumption—watching or reading a lot of fantasy or low-quality fiction can keep us trapped in *When-Then Land*, too.