

The World of “Ish”



After having lived for more than twenty-five years in a tightly scheduled world governed by clocks, since retirement, I have lived in the world of “ish”, a world governed more by whims than clocks. Instead of “Class begins at 1:35”, I now live in “I’ll see you around 5ish”. The joy of “ish” is that it leaves room for the vagaries of the unpredictable and the uncontrollable.

When I retired, I gave away my alarm clock. An astonished friend asked, “How will you wake up?” “When I want to,” I replied—and now it doesn’t really matter if I wake at 6:00 or 8:00 a.m. I find living in “ish” time an interesting place to be after years of being tied very tightly to a clock driven schedule. I am no longer bound to a mechanical or electronic device to run my days.

The simplest of acts—sleeping, for example, takes on a new feel. I don’t have to go to bed when the clock says 11:00 p.m. I no longer have to drag myself out of bed when the alarm rings at 6:00 a.m. Mornings are no longer a mad rush. My days begin when they begin often with reading and a coffee. Freed from clock time and agendas, I enter event time and the notion of flow. And with this, gone are my anxieties of having to accomplish tasks in a certain order and at a given time. Instead of 10:00 a.m. being a fifteen-minute break time, now, there is coffee time which begins and ends rather whimsically. Instead of rigidity there is fluidity. My daily life becomes a series of “ishes”. Let’s meet around 2:00ish and go for a walk. Or dinner will be 6:00ish. My events are now self-chosen, not imposed and I can choose whether to attend or not.

While I love my daily life in the land of “ish”, I recognize that there are times when clock time is essential. Businesses need to be efficient, and clock time is crucial in any area of transportation. I can’t see any international carrier declaring that the enormous 747 will leave at 5ish or so. No city planner would permit traffic lights to operate

whimsically—maybe they will be red today and green tomorrow. There is a time and a place for clock time. Lives depend upon it.

But a different type of life depends upon the fluidity of the moment which I can embrace in retirement. A distraught friend for example needs the world of “ish” not the world as defined by a clock. You really can’t say something like “I’ll stay with you for exactly twenty-two minutes and then I have to leave.”

Adjustment to this “ish” timed life has been far easier than I anticipated. With the clock no longer my master, I find events ebb and flow and that I can give myself wholly to an event as there is no scimitar of time hanging over my head ready to cut the event short because “I have to go to work/get up” in the morning. I find this freedom exhilarating.

Our sincere thanks to Brenda McNeill, world traveller and retired English teacher, for sharing her take on the “ishness” of retirement.