

IMAGINE SOMEONE OFFERED YOU A
'TIME SAVING ACCOUNT'.
YOU COULD TRANSFER ALL THE TIME THAT YOU DON'T USE IN YOUR DAILY LIFE
AND GET IT BACK WHEN YOU REQUIRE IT.

This is the setting for the children's book '*Momo*', written by the German author Michael Ende. Imagine a sleepy, Southern European town. The street sweeper, the barber, the musician all lead a contented life set against the backdrop of an ancient amphitheatre. One day 2 unexpected visitors change their daily routine. The first is Momo, a little girl who is found sleeping in the amphitheatre but no one knows where she came from. She is loved by everyone. She radiates a peace as Ende points out,

"MOMO LISTENED TO EVERYONE, TO THE DOGS AND CATS, THE CRICKETS AND TOADS, EVEN TO THE RAIN AND THE WIND IN THE TREES. AND EVERYTHING SPOKE TO HER IN ITS OWN WAY."

However, the town is also visited by ominous grey men who bring anything but warmth. Their slogan 'Time is money' immediately grabs the attention of the townspeople. Their goal is to convince the people to set up a "*time saving account*". It seems advantageous at first as the townspeople hurry and try to achieve more in less time.

But will they get back their time as promised? Time stored in the form of "*hour flowers*" and can Momo save the day?

HOURLY FLOWER POWER

How a children's book and an American psychologist
show us the importance of time

Text Anna Goldenberg

This simple, yet wonderful parable is made into a delightful book - vivid and descriptive, yet not sentimental. There is a subtlety about this book that does not try to preach to the reader. After we get to know Momo, planning every minute of your day will be the last thing you'll want to do. "*Time is money*" becomes "*time is love*".

Ende wants to present a concept where "*time is money*" seems to be inherent in each and every one of us. We get paid for the time we work; we buy time by getting the faster train or heating up that ready-made meal. But is it truly universal?

If you want further explore the discussion of time, then I recommend you read '*A Geography of Time*' by the American psychologist Robert Levine. Even though his conclusions are somewhat predictable, his examples are striking and will make you consider how you value your time. After travelling through several countries, he describes how he measured the general "*speed of life*", what happened when he decided to simply watch and how he came to define a different appreciation of time: event time.

In many humorous anecdotes the author tells of his experiences with event time - as opposed to 'Western' clock time - and the different understandings of punctuality around the world. At one point he is forced to wait 3 days at a Nepalese telephone company to get a connection to the States. Concluding that time does not seem to be money everywhere as we in the West might imagine, he recounts how people are hired to queue for someone else at magistrates' offices in Brazil. He also explores the relationship between time and status. Do we in truth want what we wait for?

In all probability the concept of the grey men exists within us all. But can Momo convince you to close your time saving account and use your hour flowers now, in the moment?

Image Fabian Mohr