

I want to invite you, as I speak, to keep in mind this Yom Kippur morning something you want to change. Maybe it's a relationship you want to work on, maybe it's an attribute of yourself you want to improve, maybe it is an activity you want to start doing more of or start doing less of. What's on your Rosh Hashanah 5769 resolution list? Let's take a quiet moment to reflect and pick something very concrete to hold in our minds as we talk about change.

Change is so hard – a powerful midrash says this, arguing that what makes one mighty, more than the capacity to create or destroy, is the capacity to change something, to alter it. How true that is! In some ways it is easier to create and destroy human life than it is to meaningfully change it. That is true of changing others and it is certainly true about changing ourselves.

There is no better time to talk about change. Besides the political rhetoric of change in our country right now, we are in the midst of a long day of shul – the longest of the year and the most intense, and we want to come out refreshed and energized with a sense that we emerged not just with chests sore from beating, but with a feeling that something will be different this year. How do we do it?

I want to talk about why change is hard, and how the history of this day offers us some wisdom about how to do some of the hardest work in the world, the work of change.

In a beautiful poem about his parents, Yehudah Amichai z"l, the great poet of Israel, reenacts the moment of the Revelation at Sinai. Except in the poem it is Amichai's father who gives the commandments, and he gives them with love and gentleness, rather than thunder and great noise. After giving the initial ten throughout his life, Amichai's father adds two more:

"Then he turned his face to me one last time, as on the day he died in my arms, and said, I would like to add two more commandments to the ten:

the Eleventh Commandment: "Thou shalt not change,"

and the Twelfth Commandment "Thou shalt change. You will change.""

Human nature is torn between these two natural laws. On the one hand, we can't change. It is in our nature to stay as we are, and to follow the courses laid out for us by those who came before us. We live a life bounded by so many natural constraints to the lives we want to lead. Physical, psychological, interpersonal, and other circumstantial realities often make change impossible.

And R' Kook says beautifully in Orot Hateshuvah, his great work on teshuvah, that even when teshuvah is possible, it is so gradual, so slow. He explains that one of the perils of the teshuvah process in the human condition is that we are gifted with an extraordinary imagination. On one hand, it enables us to see a perfected self in our mind's eye – someone who looks just like me but no longer says lashon hara, who never gets upset with people, who makes time for the important things. On the other hand, says R' Kook, it is simply impossible in our physical and spiritual lives to move anywhere near the pace of the imagination. Change – when it even can happen at all – simply doesn't happen that fast. And so, "thou shalt not change".

And yet, the Twelfth Commandment. We must change. We cannot help but change. Our lived realities compel us at times to make change. Whether it is simply growing up, losing someone or something we had previously relied on, or having something new or different enter our lives, we always adapt to the things around us. And, in a deep sense, we want to change. We have a drive to be better, to improve ourselves, to grow. Rav Kook says this beautifully, too, in his work on teshuvah, Orot Hateshuvah, arguing that the general direction of the human inclination is toward growth, toward good. It is natural to change. And so, "Thou shalt change. You will change."

The synthesis of these two commandments of Amichai's father means that the process of change is highly complex. Change both comes from and pushes against the well constructed whole of our lives, in which all the pieces fit together. We and those around us resist change for fear of the loss of orderliness in our lives and the introduction of an unknown element. Yet, the twelfth commandment tells us that we are actually always changing, often due to circumstances beyond our control. We do change, and we can change, and we want to change. The charge of the twelfth commandment is to become an *active* participant in that change – to imagine the person we want to be, and to live our lives in the service of that change.

I think to think about change on this day we should look to the ritual centerpiece of the day, the Avodah service in the Temple, which we reenact during tefilat Mussaf. I want to examine one small detail of the service to get a glimpse into change.

The High Priest, the hero of the day, had a special set of white garments which he wore for the day's service. They were the special garments of this day of internal work and growing towards atonement. They were the outfit of teshuvah, so to speak. Two things happened with these white clothes that I want to notice.

First, the Kohen Gadol switched back and forth from these clothes to his regular clothes five times over the duration of the Temple Service as he busied himself with the cultic rites of the day. For the special services of Yom Kippur he donned them, and took them back off and wore other clothes for other daily service

components. It was a laborious cycle, with immersion and hand and foot washing between each clothes change (and we thought just fasting was hard enough...).

Second, the Torah tells us a cryptic verse which we read this morning about the fate of these clothes. **וּפָשַׁט אֶת שֵׁם בְּגָדֵי הַבַּד אֲשֶׁר לָבַשׁ בְּבֹאוֹ אֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְהֵנִיחָם שָׁם** – *he took off the linen clothes he had worn for his entering into the Sanctum, and left them there* (Lev. 16:23). According to the Torah, the Kohen Gadol deposits these most sacred garments in the Holy Place, and then emerges, leaving them behind. While the details of this part of the ritual are debated by Hazal, the Torah is clear on this point: part of the culmination of the day is a final act of stripping off the garments and leaving them behind.

What do we make of these components of the day – why the repetitive switching of clothes and the final shedding of the teshuvah gear? I think they speak to two things we have to keep in mind to guide us in the process of change.

First, change is messy and it is not easy. We start and we stop. Just like the kohen gadol changed his garments over and over again on YK, we take teshuvah on and we take it off. Rav Avi explains that the phrase **כָּל הַתְּחִלּוֹת קָשׁוֹת** – all beginnings are difficult, is in plural because every beginning is always many beginnings. Every process of change has a few false starts. Fits and starts.

And unlike the crisp white clothes we are wearing today, the teshuvah gear of the Kohen Gadol surely was neither crisp nor white by the end of the avodah service. His entire day was spent handling the blood of sacrifices and walking through the smoke of the incense. By the end of the teshuvah process, that white garment must have become red and black. Teshuvah is not clean. We delude ourselves if we think of change as fluid, consistent, and smooth.

But that messiness of change is real change. The great twentieth century poet Wallace Stevens once wrote:

- A. A violent order is a disorder; and
- B. A great disorder is an order.

Chazal express a similar idea in Tractate Nedarim:

Rabbi Simeon b. Elazar said: If youth tell you “build” and elders tell you “destroy,” listen to the elders and not to the youth, for the building of youth is destruction, and the destruction of elders is building.

Sometimes breaking apart and destroying – when done with wisdom and foresight and sincerity – can be the greatest act of building and creation. Messy change is real change.

But what of casting off the clothes? The Talmud explains that the clothes of the kohen gadol are טעונים גניזה – they needed to be hidden away, buried, like pages of Torah and holy books that we no longer use.

What does that mean for us? I want to suggest a symbolic reading of the casting off of the clothes, which gets to the core of why change is so very hard. Casting off clothes enacts the process of shedding a part of ourselves. It means to admit there is something wrong in us, something we need to dispose of, in order to become who we want to be. Even when I commit to do better about that specific thing I have in mind, I only want to go forward, to grow, to achieve the better state. But in truth, there is usually a hang-up, an attachment, and old way, that I need to shed, and I need to admit to myself that I am doing something or behaving in a way which is inhibiting me from true change. So to me, the discarding of clothes at the end of the teshuvah process is a way of saying, I am so committed to becoming that better person that I am willing to let go of some part of me that is holding me back. And even as I cast it off, I will preserve it and remember it, to know that change requires shedding a part of ourselves, and that that is a sacred act. That is what the Kohen Gadol models for us on Yom Kippur.

If you're still sitting with that thing you want to change in your mind, I invite you to take the Mussaf service ahead, and especially the period of the Avodah, the commemoration of the Temple service, to remember that change is one of the hardest things. Don't expect it to be a smooth road. There will be messes and junk along the way. Then – ask yourself, what part of me is holding me back from change? What do I need to let go of. Let's shed those garments, and leave them here, buried in the Bayit, a time capsule for change and teshuvah.

And as we enter Yizkor, let us remember those people in our lives who, like Yehudah Amichai's father, were our role models in the messy work of change.

May we, today, and throughout the coming year, embody the words of Yehudah Amichai's father: "and the Twelfth Commandment "Thou shalt change. You will change." "