

Today I want to start with a short story:

A man walked to the top of a hill to talk to G-d.
The man asked, "G-d, what's a million years to you?"
And G-d said "A minute."
Then the man asked:
"Well, what's a million dollars to you?"
and G-d said: "A penny"
Then the man asked:
"G-d.....can I have a penny?"
And G-d said:
"Sure.....In a minute."

Every year between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we make new resolutions and plan how to fulfill them. We promise ourselves that this year we will be better people, improve our health, or excel in our careers. We take time to look inside, analyze the successes and mistakes of the past year, and plan to improve our futures.

On Rosh Hashanah we're granted a unique chance to pause our hectic schedules and take the time we need to think about our lives. What are our most important values? What are our goals? How can we improve ourselves and the world around us? How can we use this holiday as a time to start a transformation?

This year, while searching for inspiration, I came across a mini-documentary from the New York Times about an incredible man who took his life into his own hands. It's a story of complete transformation. I fell in love with his story and want to share it with you today.

Dr. John Kitchin, was a hot-shot neurologist who seemed to have it all: a top-notch job, financial security, a fancy assortment of sports cars, an exotic animal farm and more. However, John was empty. After a failed marriage and eyesight issues, he realized it was time to reevaluate himself and his life. After looking to

his career and questioning his work as a doctor, John had an epiphany: it was time to make a change. But unlike so many others, he actually took action.

John knew that all his wealth and material things did not bring him lasting happiness. But for him to be fully aware of his situation, John took a step back, did some deep thinking, and thought about the big picture and his purpose and role in this life. He did this by asking himself just one question:

“How much of today promoted me spiritually, and how much of it promoted me financially?” John finally realized that despite spending countless hours and years of his life devoted to his career as a doctor, he was not satisfied.

John made drastic changes. He sold his house and possessions and moved to San Diego. There he stumbled upon his true happiness – slowly roller blading by the beach – and even took on a new name – Slomo.

After making the radical transformation from Dr. John Kitchin to Slomo, he received many criticisms of his newfound identity. Slomo said, “Nobody thought I was normal. Even me, I had been trained to think this was a type of mental illness.” However, Slomo didn’t listen to the “haters”. He had been a hater before, he had lived the life that others expected of him. But now that he had experienced a sense of divinity in his skating, he knew that no other thing in this world could bring him the same amount of joy and satisfaction.

Slomo has found his happiness. But how can we find our happiness? How do we make changes in our own life? How can we improve ourselves? How can we find our calling?

I’ve come up with what I believe to be the three most important lessons or steps we can learn from Slomo’s life in order to ignite passion and happiness in our own lives this coming year. I want you to view these steps as my take on how to make changes in our lives easier. You don’t need to follow them to the letter, just take their value and see how you can apply these lessons to your own lives.

1. **The first is becoming more self aware.** We need to try to realize who we genuinely are and do so by asking the difficult questions. Why do we do what we do? We need to take a step back and find out of what makes us tick – what makes us happy, what makes us sad? What can we talk about for hours on end without ever growing tired? What makes us come alive?

This is a process. It takes time and doesn't happen overnight.

But the simple fact that you begin asking yourself these questions means that you are challenging and getting to know yourself. This introspection is something that our tradition tasks us to do during the high holiday season, and I urge you to take some time in the coming days and weeks to do some deep thinking.

2. The second step is recognizing the need for change.

For a moment, let's look back one year ago on Rosh Hashanah 2016. What did each of us promise to change? Did we adjust something we really wanted and needed to change? For many of us, myself included, the answer is no. In the end, this realization might leave most of us feeling let down and disappointed. But I believe that we can use that frustration to help us with the year ahead. We must take that frustration and disappointment and funnel it into creative, positive energy that can help us with making changes. It's time to take action. As Hillel asks in *Pirkei Avot*, "Eem lo achshav eimatai?" -- "If not now, when?"

3. This leads me into the third step -- **ensuring that our desire for change is translated to action and that actions lead to actual change.** For changes to be of true value, they have to be lasting and consistent. I'm not saying that we need to make changes as drastic as Slomo did. What I am saying is that even for the smallest changes, we need to find the drive and the courage to approach them on a regular basis. We need to remain consistent and in order to do so we need to figure out exactly what our goals should be.

Ask yourself the following: How am I going to live the next ten years of my life? Yes, ten years, not five, not three, not just next year. How can I apply what I learned from my introspection to my vision of the future? What actions, large or small, can I take to work towards happiness? Once you have your answers, other questions emerge: How can I keep track of my progress? How can others help me? How can I keep progressing once I've accomplished my first goal?

Without a true plan of action, it's very difficult to stay committed. With an action plan, you are able to take your life into your own hands, and stay on track.

This Rosh Hashanah prove to yourself that you can make a change. I encourage you to go through this process: **start a process of introspection, recognize the need for change, and then take action.** You can make this as easy or difficult as you want. My suggestion? Choose one easy decision and one that is a little bit more difficult. Show yourself what you can do and stick to it.

At the start of my sermon, I told a story of a man asking for help from God. What's the message? For me, it's that we only have a short time on this Earth. If we're not doing things that excite and bring us happiness, then what's the point? If we're not challenging ourselves and constantly changing, learning, and growing, why are we here?

Howard Thurman said "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

So this year let's go beyond who we are and who we think we can be. Let's recognize that we are on an amazing journey. Let's look deep inside. And Let's not be afraid to make the difficult decisions, so that in turn, we can improve our lives, the lives of those around us, and make the world a better place.

Shanah tovah, happy and healthy good year.