

Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman
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In the weeks after I gave birth, I was a complete wreck. I was depressed, sick, and exhausted, and my body was producing only a tiny fraction of the milk that my baby, Meytal, needed each day. Meytal and I began to sleep downstairs as I valiantly tried to nurse through the night. During those long hours awake each night I began to realize that I needed to do *something* to get me through.

I decided that the answer was television, and soon I was at the video store looking for a t.v. series. "You should really try Six Feet Under," offered the woman behind the counter. I appreciated not having to make difficult decisions for myself and thanked her.

I must say that I enjoyed Six Feet Under very much. The show depicts members of the Fisher family who run a funeral home in Los Angeles, and on a good night – which was really a bad night – I could watch three episodes. In one, the family works on a Jewish funeral, and Nate, one of the main characters, seeks spiritual guidance from Rabbi Ari, the stylish, female rabbi who is officiating at the funeral.

Nate is full of angst about his relationship with Brenda. After listening to him pour out his heart, Rabbi Ari says, "Your soulmate is the person who forces your soul to grow the most. Not all growth feels good."

Not all growth feels good...

Well of course it doesn't feel good. To grow means to change, and who likes to change? It's uncomfortable, and it brings up all sorts of things that we don't like to think about. Who are we and what are we doing with our lives? Why is there such an ugly gap between our values and our actions? Why won't we let go of our narrow assumptions so that we can live more fully?

These High Holy Days remind us that changing – and growing – is always possible. We don't need Rabbi Ari to tell us that not all growth feels good – we wouldn't have this period of time every year to direct our attention to it if it was easy and always felt good.

We come here to look at ourselves for who we really are, to listen to that quiet voice inside of us that speaks to our deepest ideals, that knows right from wrong, that is often drowned out by the noise of our daily lives. If we want to change and grow we have to pay attention, listen carefully, confront ourselves, and muster up tremendous courage.

The six weeks after Meytal's birth were really hard. I was deeply overwhelmed for much of the time. I felt weak and unable to keep up with my older daughter, Eliana, who was then a rambunctious toddler. I hated that I was sick and rundown. Walking around the block was a chore. I felt guilty that I was not having a blissful experience with my newborn. I was really sad

that I was not able to nurse, and no matter how hard I tried, I could not make my body produce milk.

But over time I really did grow from the experience. I let go of long-held assumptions. I reconciled fresh disappointments. I learned to parent differently, and I adjusted to new circumstances. I was able to recognize that I was blessed to have a healthy birth and a healthy baby, excellent medical care, and a wonderful partner and two-year old daughter.

I'm not particularly unique in wrestling with unexpected disappointments, and the Bible is full of stories where things just don't go as people had hoped they would. Take Elijah, the famous prophet we sing about during Havdalah and pour a cup of wine for every Passover.

He was much worse off than I was. Queen Jezebel had just issued a death sentence for him and he had fled to the Judean desert. She was mad because he had ordered the death of 450 of her priests who were worshiping other gods. The whole incident left Elijah really depressed. He couldn't see a way out, and he had become totally hopeless. He sat down under a bush and pleaded with God to take his life. "Enough!" he cried out before falling asleep.

An angel came to Elijah and woke him up. The angel gave him food and water, but he fell asleep again. So the angel woke him a second time: "Elijah, wake up, there is a long journey ahead of you." Elijah did as he was told, and with renewed strength he walked for forty days and forty nights to Mount Horeb. When he arrived, he entered a cave and again fell asleep.

As he was sleeping, God came to him and asked, "*Mah lecha po, Eliyahu?* What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Elijah didn't like the question. He must have sensed that it was an existential kind of question. He responded defensively. "I am moved by zeal for the Lord," he began. Then he complained about the Israelites who were disobeying God's ways. "I am alone," he cried out bitterly, "and they want to kill me."

God did not respond directly to Elijah, but instead called to him, "Come out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." God started showing Elijah some miracles. First, a mighty wind that split mountains and rocks. But God was not in the wind. Then, a powerful earthquake. But, God was not in the earthquake. Then, a raging fire. But, God was not in the fire. And then, "*kol de'mamah dakah* – a still, small voice was heard."

When Elijah heard the voice he wrapped his face in his cloak and came out of the cave. And then God asked him again, "*Mah lecha po, Eliyahu?* What are you doing here, Elijah?"

It's the same question that we ask ourselves this Rosh Hashanah. Why have you come? Will you change and grow in the year to come or will you remain stagnant and stuck in your ways? Have you listened to that still, small voice inside of you?

That still, small voice beckons us to pay attention. But we only hear it if we listen for it. It's the voice of our conscience, the voice of our deepest truths, the voice of our sacred encounter with the Divine. We don't need to wait for God to split mountains or shatter rocks, and we don't

need to wait for some momentous event to erupt in our lives. Growth can happen during times of great crisis or joy, but it can also happen when we are confronted with ordinary disappointments and frustrations, with everyday challenges, and with moments of relief and happiness. To be awake to the still, small voice is to embrace the life that we are handed, to be present, and to be willing to grow.

The pastor at the church where my office is located has a bumper sticker on her car that reads, "Change is inevitable. Growth is optional." If you had to boil down the layers upon layers of meanings and philosophies upon which the High Holy Days are based to a bumper sticker, this would be it. Change is inevitable. Growth is optional.

I'm not sure whether Elijah really changed and was really able to grow from witnessing God's wind, earthquake, fire, and then still small voice. After experiencing all that, and hearing God's same question, "What are you doing here?" Elijah responds with the same, defensive answer as before: "I am moved by zeal for the Lord" and again complains about the Israelites and pities himself. God had been trying to teach Elijah that being a zealot and admiring big miracles are not the best way to serve God, but Elijah just doesn't seem to get it.

In many ways we don't get it either. We witness miracles every day. Not wind, earthquakes, and fire, but miracles like friendship and love and community. The miracle of new life, of new chances, of new beginnings. We can be so impatient and stuck in our expectations and desire to control the direction of our lives that we miss these miracles. We don't recognize how precious life is and we aren't grateful for the many blessings that we have.

Elijah is impressed by power, and he doesn't seem to pay attention to that still, small voice. But maybe we're not being fair to him. He does, after all, change his behavior. He abandons his plea to God to take his life and takes courageous steps out of his cave. He continues on his journey, appoints a new king, and recruits a new prophet to take his place. He reenters the world to do God's work.

It's not always possible to create internal and external change at the same time. Sometimes we just need to do the right thing, even if it's hard, and even if we're still feeling defensive. So rarely do we have deep, spiritual epiphanies that lead us to profoundly change who we are. But we can still go out into the world and do what we know we should do.

Over time, doing what we know we should do does lead to deep inner change. Sometimes we just have to walk out of the cave and continue on our journey. The learning and the growth will come. We can use these days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to listen deeply to the still, small voice inside us and to confront ourselves so that we are better able to do the right thing.

Earlier today we chanted the haunting Unetaneh Tokef prayer which is based in part on the story of Elijah – "*Uveshofar gadol yitakah* – And the great shofar is sounded" and "*u'vkol demamah dakah* – and the still, small voice is heard." May the shofar wake us up to new possibilities, and may we have the courage to listen to the still, small voice inside us so that we can embrace these possibilities. May we look at ourselves honestly and discern where we need

to change and how we need to grow. May we listen carefully and pay attention to our conscience, to our deepest truths, to our sacred encounters of the Divine.

L'shanah tovah – may it be a good year, a year of growth and change.