

L'Shanah Tovah L'Kulam

(May all have a Good New Year),

When I was a younger man with more discretionary time, I was in a very casual bowling league with a couple of buddies back in Michigan. Mostly, it was just for fun but, along the way, I also worked on my technique and learned how to bowl a decent game. We laughed a lot and bantered with the teams we competed against, but my favorite part of the experience (even now) is the meditative moment of lining my toes up with the line. Lifting the ball towards my chin, I take a moment to breathe, focus, take the correct number of steps, let gravity pull the ball down and back, and then swing it forward again with just the correct amount of twist of the wrist. If I get it right, it connects with the floor absent any bounce or clunk. Then, the agonizing eternity as I wait to see what happens 60' away.

This sort of careful attention to the details of movement is well-known to athletes who spend countless hours perfecting the art of doing it just right...over and over and over again. When I'm sailing, I want to tack at just the right moment with smooth movements as I switch the setting of the sail. When I am swimming, I want every single stroke to look beautiful because the absence of splash indicates the peak of efficiency combined with speed and endurance. The goal being that, when it "counts," the conditioning means they will be able to reproduce the desired outcome with a high degree of reliability.

This is great so long as what you're working to condition are behaviors and techniques that serve you well. But, what if this highly valuable consistency isn't working and needs to be disrupted? I'm no golfer, but if your swing isn't doing what you want, you might need a coach to help deconstruct it and build it back up into a new form. Nor is it limited to sport. This same willingness to reexamine-everything-you've-always-done is familiar to business people struggling to stay ahead of ever-changing markets and to politicians looking to lead populations into uncharted territories. It is essential to the work of scientists and it is at the core of academia. And, surprise of surprises: purposefully disrupting our comfort zones yields new and unexpected possibilities in every field.

It should come as no shock that being open to the "Purposeful Disruption" of an individual's patterns, habits and assumptions would similarly offer new horizons for personal growth. We are all hard-wired to prefer predictability. But, we are also imbued with a magnificent potential for making changes. (It's called Free Will!) The stories in the Bible are nothing if not encouragement towards making positive choices and the cautionary tales of those who failed to do so. Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Nachson and Miriam are just a few of the best-known ancestors who decided to try something radically different and we have all benefited from it.

So if, in this new year of 5779, you're committed to the behaviors that you've employed thus far and doing what you've always done, then I'll remind you that you'll always get what you've always gotten. If, on the other hand, you'd like to entertain the possibility of growth in the coming New Year, then I encourage you to come to High Holy Day services prepared to explore the cracks beginning to show in your façade. Embrace the idea of "Purposeful Disruption" and try something healthy and new this year.

After all, for those using Temple Sinai to its highest and best potential – Growth Happens Here! May it be a good and sweet New Year for you and all those you care about.

L'shalom, In Peace

Jay TelRav