

Rolling with the Changes **Parashat Shemot, 5778**

The Clever Jester :

Once, a jester worked in a royal court. The king who ruled the kingdom respected the jester a lot. The jester was not only good at cracking jokes but was clever enough to help the king in some official matters. Many a times the jester would make the king the butt of his joke.

One day he joked about the king as usual but the king felt insulted by it and grew very angry. In anger he said, "Guards, seize this man. He is making fun of me, the king of this country! Put him in prison. He will be hanged three days from now."

Three days later, the jester was brought to court. The king asked, "You will be hanged an hour later. Choose how you want to die. It will be your last wish." The clever jester replied, "Your Majesty, I choose to die of old age."

Change happens to each of us, all the time. We are, in fact, in a constant state of change, though we often feel that our lives and our identities are fixed. We are the same people when we woke up today as we were when we went to sleep.

Except, we are slightly different. We changed our clothes, our hair and nails have grown slightly, and millions of our cells, the very building blocks of our

bodies, have died and been replaced anew over the past day. Millions of barely perceptible things are altered in our bodies, minds, and hearts every day, but we still feel like ourselves.

These changes, however, seem small and imperceptibly incremental. Even so, we know that at one point, we were babies, then we grew and changed, and experienced all of the unforeseen ups and downs of life. Many of us have babies of our own; some of them have now even grown to have babies of their own! So how do we live in a world in which change is a constant, but where we feel as though things stay more or less the same? What do we do when change comes that seems sudden and shakes us into noticing it?

One answer I came across that I think gives us both a great view of a universe imbued with change and the impetus to be a part of it comes from the incredible Brazilian author, Paulo Coelho:

“When we least expect it, life sets us a challenge to test our courage and willingness to change; at such a moment, there is no point in pretending that nothing has happened or in saying that we are not yet ready. The challenge will not wait. Life does not look back.” (Paulo Coelho, *The Devil and Ms. Prym*)

We cannot simply stop to assess each change in our lives because time will not wait. I cannot even accurately answer someone when they ask, “What time is it?”

because in the time it takes me to check my watch, the moment has already passed on and a new one has begun.

To sit with change, it often helps to anchor ourselves to what is unchanging. Our Torah, whose words have remained unchanged for thousands of years, is an invaluable resource to understand how to handle and manage change and its. It describes Avram diving headfirst into a new land and a new life when asked to trust in God. Moses runs from all he knew and discovered that where he was going had so much to do with the people from which he came.

And even God changes. We read numerous stories where individuals or groups argue with God and get God to alter a decision previously made, from the daughters of Tzeloph'chad to the Oven of Achnai. In Parashat Shemot, which we read this Shabbat, God (Ex. 3:14) describes God's central essence using the unique name **אהיה אשר אהיה**, which literally means "I will be what I will be." It's important that it is not **היה אשר היה**, "I am how I always was," or "I am who I currently am," but I, Creator of the Universe, am **CONSTANTLY** becoming and changing.

Rabbi Toba Spitzer sums up this idea that God is a presence both surrounding and flowing through an ever-changing world:

“It is in God’s nature, just as it is in human nature—indeed, in all of nature—to change, evolve, and grow. It is also in the nature of things that true power is not unidirectional or absolute, but relational. All life is interdependent, and the ability to adapt to changes in the surrounding environment—that is, to allow oneself to be affected by others—is the key to the survival and development of all living beings.”

If even God is open to change and evolution, so too must we be.

We are in the midst of a great change in our community. Tomorrow, our friends and partners at The Journey will be having their first church services here in this building. Their excitement and enthusiasm not only for making this place their home, but also for getting to know our community, sharing this space, becoming neighbors and friends, is incredible. It is an opportunity for great joy and building wonderful new relationships.

But changes do mean leaving parts of our lives that were comforting and familiar. And while we know that the sale of this building to the Journey and our purchase of the Maryland Ave property happened back in April, it is only now as we are living, learning, worshiping, and creating community here together that we can really see and feel these changes full force.

We know that we are on a long path ahead. Right now, we can only glimpse the future, but I urge you not to see the changes around us as somehow detracting from who we are as a community, but as a window into our own

future. Very soon, we will be rejoicing just as the Journey is now, moving into a new home, seeing the possibilities they have dreamed about, planned for, worked on, and shared together come into fruition.

So instead of retracting, instead of holding new things at arm's length, embrace all of the new and wonderful possibilities. We have the unique and wonderful privilege to share our home with a new community of friends and neighbors. They have chosen to make this site their home. They see how special this place has been for us and love what it can be for them as well. Meet them. Embrace them. Share with them all the incredible memories you have, and get to know some of their stories. Come with us on the voyage ahead, and you will be able to add your voice, your spirit and your care to help our entire community become exactly what it will become.