



CHANGE IS IMPOSSIBLE

Dear Parents,

Erev Rosh Hashana 5781

Facing the *Yomim Noraim* is always an awesome task. We look for ways to find favor in *Hashem's* eyes. We examine our ways and look to see what we can change. We resolve to improve, take on new practices, act with more care and sensitivity and focus more on our relationship with *Hashem*. At the same time, there's a feeling deep inside, that it won't really make a difference. I won't be able to sustain any meaningful change. I am who I am and I try my best.

This leads to the commonly asked question - why is it so hard to do real *Teshuva*? Every year we commit to change, but more likely than not, we find ourselves in the same position the next year, and the next. This quandary is highlighted by *Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zt"l*, in a *mussar* talk he gave on *Parashas Netzavim*. (*Sichos Mussar Maamar 32, 5731*) Based on the *Ramban* and *Seforno*, the *pesukim* (*Devarim 30:11-14*) that describe how *'this Mitzvah'* is easily within reach, not distant, not across oceans and not in heaven, are in fact, referring to doing *Teshuva*. *Rav Shmuelevitz* asks, if doing *Teshuva* is so easy, why is it so hard?

“...why is it so hard to do real *Teshuva*?”

Rav Shmuelevitz replies that in theory, *Teshuva* is easy because it is so obviously beneficial to us. However, it is in fact hard because we are creatures of habit, and we have an exceedingly difficult time changing our habits, lifestyles and how we spend our time. Our mind wants to enact change, but we are mired in our routines and attitudes. We easily habituate ourselves to our current situation and have an almost insurmountable challenge in changing because of what *Rav Shmuelevitz* calls “the slumber of habit.”

Wait. Are we still “mired in our routines and attitudes”? Hasn't something cataclysmic happened in our life and in our world that has upended everything? Hasn't the coronavirus forced us to accept situations and practices that weren't even on the radar last *Rosh Hashana*? Haven't we all experienced the reality of accepting the unacceptable as commonplace? Haven't we all come to grips with things not being in our control, not going the way we planned?

The pandemic that *Hashem* has confronted us with is for a reason. We have no *Neviim* (prophets) to tell us the reason, but we can take lessons from that which is obvious. *Rav Shmuelevitz* explained that the biggest impediment to *teshuvah* comes from being stuck in our habits. Are we still so stuck? Hasn't covid changed so many things for us? Could that lesson be the silver lining of the difficulties we have been enduring for half a year now?

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We need to take the time to reflect on what has changed for us, and how we have changed in our attitudes and practices these past six months. What challenges have we risen to successfully? How have we adapted our work practices, our communal involvement, our connection with our children? We have undergone meaningful and substantial changes in how we live our lives day to day. What a great segue into changes in the spiritual realm.

adapting to new realities. I do things new practices, intensifying my davening, extending my learning time, I am not engaged in mere wishful thinking. It is now – “I can do this” because I've just been doing this for six long months.

We can enter this *Rosh Hashana* with a new mindset. I am familiar with changing, being flexible, differently than I did six months ago and I'm still on my feet! Now, when I contemplate taking on

To our children, much of what they have absorbed and understood is “Oh, there are pandemics from time to time.” They see things as fitting some routine of normalcy, because that is how children find security in an insecure world. They could learn a really important lesson from the pandemic, and need their parents' good example to teach it to them. That lesson is - changing and improving also happens from time to time. Let that become your mantra, and it will become their attitude for life.

“We have undergone meaningful and substantial changes in how we live our lives day to day.”

Best wishes for a *Yom Tov* of meaningful change and the self-confidence that this time, my promises will last, because I know how to roll with the punches, handle challenges with equanimity and will persevere, for myself and my family.

Best wishes for *Kesiva V'Chasima Tova*

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