

Rosh HaShanah Day 1 5785

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Boker Tov, Hag Sameach, Shana Tovah! Could you imagine how boring life would be if we were perfect? How little we'd advance or grow if we never made mistakes? We are not perfect. We make mistakes. And if we're smart, lucky, and open; those mistakes become the fertilizer we need to grow into better, more complete people. In Judaism, we celebrate this. We have an entire set of holidays centered around admitting that we missed the mark on and will try to do better.

Acknowledging these mistakes is hard and accepting that we've made them and are at fault is even harder. It takes strength to admit that we

are mistaken and more so, make an effort to not feel shame about changing our minds.

Recently, I was reading an interview in the New York Times of Malcolm Gladwell, the author of *The Tipping Point* and several other books discussing ideas of social science, such as what can we learn from outliers, why are people successful, etc. In this article, Gladwell talks about how the chapter he wrote in the *Tipping Point* about “Broken Windows” and their role in fixing society’s ills was wrong. He doesn’t obfuscate. He doesn’t justify it. He admits, quote, “I was just wrong.” Gladwell goes on to describe how he holds his ideas loosely and others

should too.¹ He recognizes that his book was written 25 years ago and that maybe what he was so sure was right then, maybe wasn't so correct. What strikes me is his self-reflection. That one's understanding not just can but **should** change in 25 years. I find it admirable that he first admits that he was mistaken, hard stop. Only after that does he expound.

Gladwell highlights for us a very Jewish concept, the need to be reflective on how we are living and being open to new understanding, even of the Torah. For example: sections of Exodus, Leviticus, and

¹ Emma Goldberg New York Times interview with Malcolm Gladwell - https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/26/business/malcolm-gladwell-revenge-of-the-tipping-point.html?algo=editorial_importance_fy_email_news&block=4&campaign_id=142&emc=edit_fory_20240926&felback=false&imp_id=7973542683715801&instance_id=135374&nl=for-you&nid=79906651&pool=fye-top-news-ls&rank=1®i_id=79906651&req_id=5336842701298436&segment_id=178928&surface=for-you-email-news&te=1&user_id=349abeb5783542d2503c5c942ed5ec61&variant=0_edimp_fye_news_dedupe

Deuteronomy describes to us laws about how we are supposed to treat our slaves. Thank God, today we have an understanding that slavery is wrong—Full stop. No matter how nicely you may treat someone, it is repugnant to own another human being. A more recent example is the value Judaism puts on men over women. Thank God, we have grown now in our denomination and understand that women are equal and can participate in all aspects of Jewish society. We do not need to differentiate based on gender or sex who can lead the community, read from the torah, or offer prayers. We can and should grow with time. And this growth is not reserved for large, moral or ethical considerations. How many of you enjoy beans and rice on Passover?

The allowance of *kitniyot* during *Pesach* is a much more modern change to Jewish custom. I know there are some who will keep this stringency of not eating legumes during *Pesach*, but I for one am so happy that our denomination has chosen for the sake of *Klal Yisrael*, the unity of the Jewish people, to hold that all may eat *Kitniyot* on *Pesach*, not just those lucky enough to be Sephardic or Mizrachi.

What lessons can we learn from these examples of Halakhic development? That just as major mores of society can be reflected on and change, so too can our actions. If Judaism, so entrenched in tradition, can grow and change, so can we as individuals. We need to see where we might be blinded in thinking the way we always have.

Just because there is a precedent does not mean that is how it always needs to be. Let us allow our ideas to be held a bit looser. Let us be open to new insight wherever it may come from. Let us allow for new understanding and growth, enabling us to adapt and evolve. We should permit ourselves to learn and not become stuck in the way we see the world.

We can do this, and I hope we are inspired to do so in the coming year.

Rosh HaShanah is the first in what our tradition calls the *Aseret Yamei Teshuva*, the Ten Days of Repentance. We can change who we were and move in a better direction.

A willingness to change is the first and most meaningful step in personal transformation. The beauty of being human is knowing that we have the potential to learn. We are not static stones moored to the ground under the weight of our own thoughts and actions. Instead, we are dynamic beings who can reinvent ourselves and change our programming. We do not have to be the same in this coming year that we have been during the previous. I pray this New Year that each of us is strengthened to be humble about where we were wrong and step forward into being better in the days to come.

Shana Tovah U'Metukah – A Good and Sweet New Year!