

Rosh HaShanah 5773, Second Day—Study Meditation

Sermon

Rabbi Karen Fox

September 18, 2012

Change happens—that is the truth we live with. Often we notice that things change, we experience the transition from summer heat to fall colors to winter white to spring blossoms, and heat again. We experience change in family life, from the exhilaration of the new baby, to the pride of childhood, to the angst of adolescence and young adult life, to the satisfaction, growth and relationship building found in maturity, to the vulnerability that older ages bring.

Change can be wonderful, frightening, exhausting, relieving. It can spark sadness or happiness; it can open doors. At Rosh HaShanah we imagine and initiate change, we reflect and grow anew again. Our Rabbis believed and taught that. This morning, we'll focus on a text—study it together, have an opportunity to discuss aspects of it with our neighbors and I hope to invite you into a guided meditation.

(Rabbi Fox read the following text aloud; congregants studied it, responded to questions with a partner and reflected on the questions on the worksheet in small groups. After 10 minutes, we came together—just to highlight its impact. Rabbi Fox concluded with a meditation.)

Talmud Brachot 16b

And Rabbi Yitzhak said: (during the Ten Days of Awe), four things cancel God's first draft plan for the next year for human beings. These are the things that cancel God's original plan:

Tzedakah—Bringing justice into the world.

Tzaakah—Crying out to God.

Sheenui Shem—Changing one's name.

Sheenui Maase—Changing one's actions.

Some say, also

Sheenui Makom—Changing one's place.

Tzedakah, what is our source?

"Bringing Just Action saves one from death" (Proverbs 11:4).

Tz'a'kah—Crying out—what is our source?

"When God heard their crying out, in the narrow constriction that was Egypt." (Exodus 3:7)

A Change of name, what is our source?

"Sarai shall no longer be called Sarai, but Sarah is her name and I shall bless her & give her a son." (Genesis 17:)

A Change of action, what is our source?

Regarding Nineveh, "God saw their actions & they repented from their lawless ways. God relented from the destruction He had planned." (Jonah 3:10)

Some say:

A Change of place, what is our source?

"God said to Avram, Go from your land to a land that I will show you & there I will make your name great." (Genesis 12:1)

Study Questions (turn to one or two people around you and respond to these questions):

- a. *What kinds of change are made in this text? Name them.*
- b. *Why do these changes influence God enough to rip up God's previous plans, to move a person's fate from death towards life?*
- c. *Do any of these changes work for you as you make **Tshuvah** (spiritual transformation)? Is there another kind of change that you will make?*
- d. *What change/changes do you hope and pray for in this New Year?*

Guided Meditation:

Rabbi Fox narrates:

The Rabbis' vision moves us; it announces that people have the potential to initiate change and God supports us in the process.

But that is our work, the work of our hearts and souls.

I invite you take a few moments now through a quiet reflective time to do the deeper work of change.

Try to get comfortable in your chair. Maybe relax your neck and shoulders; if you can, your feet comfortably beneath you. If you are comfortable, close your eyes. You might want to take in a couple of even paced breaths, a couple of

comfortable breaths.
Breathing in, breathing out.
Breathing in, breathing out.

Just reflect and pray; you might say something like this to yourself:

“May I make one change this year God, may I make a change a small change that makes a difference, may I hope for that change & move toward it bit by bit.”

Can you imagine the change?
What might you name it?
Do you see it?
Can you feel it?
Can you see yourself longing for it?
Can you feel open enough to pray for it?

(2 minutes silence)

May I make a change, a personal change that is doable. May that change give me strength and hope as I move into the New Year. (Ps 27:14)
L’shanah tovah tikatavu—May you be inscribed for blessing in this New Year
5773.