CHANGE
Temple Judea Second Day Rosh Hashanah 5770
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz - 9/20/2009

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That video has almost nothing to do with the actual topic of my sermon – but I thought it was funny. I guess on one level it does relate to my topic with you this morning. I want to talk about change, not the kind that jingles but the sweeping, rapid and unsettling change we have been experiencing so far in the 21st century.

Do you remember way back about 10 years ago at the start of this decade when scientists, computer programmers, politicians and just about everyone else were all up in arms about the Y2K problem. Doomsday prophets and conspiracy theorists predicted the end of the world as we knew it – ten years later it turns out they were right. Not because of some missing ones and zeros in the matrix of programming code but because the world as we knew it and took comfort in has been turned on its head – and left many of us shouting the ubiquitous title of the David Merrick musical "Stop the world I want to get off."

Historian Stephen Ambrose poses the question in his History of the Transcontinental Railroad – "Which generation has lived through the greatest change? "The one that lived through the coming of the automobile and the airplane and the beginning of modern medicine? Or the one that was around for the invention and first use of the atomic bomb and the jet airplane? Or the computer? Or the Internet and e-mail?

For Ambrose, it was the Americans who lived through the second half of the nineteenth century. They saw slavery abolished and electricity put to use, the development of the telephone and the completion of the telegraph, and most of all the railroad which was the first great triumph over time and space.

As I look at the change that has occurred so far in my lifetime – let alone your lifetimes I have to wonder if we might not be living in a similarly hyper change era. I hope you will excuse the obvious but many of you have been here longer than me – and I don't mean sitting in shul – at that my colleagues and I still have you beat. But the change you have seen in your life is staggering in its scope, pace and impact on our daily lives. Just as we learn a new technology, set aside an old convention, embrace an old enemy, or accept a new reality – everything changes.

- The internet and email have replaced the post office and letters
- Cell phones and text messaging have replaced – land lines and post cards
- Summer has replaced what used to count for Fall in Southern California
- An African American is now President of the United States and a Latina is on the Supreme Court
- People live longer than they used to – though we weigh more

- The Red Sox actually won a world series – but the Cubs are still waiting for next year (some thing never change)

The unsettling thing is not that things change it is that they change in seemingly unpredictable and unintended ways. We have no problem with intended and planned for change – indeed we call that progress and accomplishment. Email, cell phones, 24-hour news; but surprising change, rapid, unexpected change that is harder for us to accommodate in our psyche.

Think of a car travelling on the freeway. If the driver puts the turn signal on and then after a suitable amount of time begins to slowly and safely change lanes – everything works fine as long as we ourselves are paying attention and make the proper adjustments to accommodate the new vehicle in our lane – to make space for change. But if the driver just cuts the wheel and pulls into our lane – well you have a sig alert and the shockwaves from that one lane change reverberate across the southland.

This past year has felt like the later – like someone just cut us off on our slow steady progress toward retirement, home ownership, advancement at work, matriculation in our schools. BOOM out of no where this big rig we call The Credit Crisis swerved into the lane we call our path in life and worse still it started to spill all sorts of other problems out its tailgate.

When you suddenly find yourself without a livelihood, unable to find work, desperately behind on your bills, maybe even losing your home, you are dealing with more than just the feeling that "things have changed." You're dealing with feeling that 'everything is lost." This is not simply a feeling of being disrupted or having to change lanes, this is a feeling of having to swerve to avoid an accident, of being threatened. Even if you're not facing change on that order of calamity, but a significant change in your life nonetheless, the threat could be very much a part of your experience. Most of us feel that our very way of life is threatened when we face any kind of major change, especially if it is around the Big Three

- RELATIONSHIP
- MONEY
- HEALTH

If one of these things is changing it can be very challenging, if two of these are changing it can be incredibly difficult and if all three are changing at the same time, it can be utterly devastating."[i]

On the macro scale – it would appear that this is what is happening to our country right now as a whole. Our relationship with our government and other nations friend and foe alike is changing. In fact the political debate – such that it is in our nation today on health care, spending, civil rights, etc is really not a debate in favor or against change – but what direction and shape that inevitable change should take.

Change in our relationship with our government is happening we are just arguing over how to shape it.

On the personal level – our relationships are in a constant state of change from internal and external forces. From the couple that has seen their income reduced by 20% in a mater of weeks, or aging parents that sandwich us into parenting in two directions at once or children that are always changing and require us to adjust to support and guide them – even if they fight us along the way. Our spouse which we may see as the one constant, the rock upon which we lean for support. They change too – often we are the first to encounter it but the last to accept it.

I advise my wedding couples that marriage is like a moving target. It is constantly shifting, moving in and out of focus depending on everything else that is going on in our lives. It is when couples take their eye off the ball. When they close their eyes to the ongoing change in their relationships that they loose sight of the relationship they are working to create together. I also advise my wedding couples that marriage would be so much easier if it didn't involve another person.

You don't need me to innumerate for you how money has changed our lives this past year – for us individually for sure and for our country and its various services, obligations and endeavors.

Nationally our health too has changed – by some Internet accounts – you would think everything we eat, breath, drink or touch will kill us. Those may be more fiction than fact – but it is true that technology and the massive scale and interdependence of the global economy have introduced both great medical advances – cancer treatments, modern medicines - and threats to our well being – swine flu, food additives - that we feel ill prepared and under informed to face.

That is all not to mention climate change, two very active wars and the replacement of Paula Abdul as a judge on American Idol. For some it feels like the world is coming to an end – if not the world on a large scale then the personal individual world we have carefully built over our lifetime on relationships, health and money.

Benjamin Disraeli wrote, "Change is inevitable, change is constant" a look back over the long history of the world from the steam engine to the Internet and all that came before both bares that out. Our world is in a constant state of change it is always moving closer to or further away for the ideal as we see it.

But I say, "Thank God for change!" Philosopher and theologian alike have long debunked utopian theories of a world that is unchanging. The Garden of Eden held no allure for Adam & Eve until something changed. When all their needs were met perfectly without challenge, toil, success or failure they had no knowledge of the value of life and their relationship to each other and the world around them. Change gives perspective on life it reminds us of where we were and enables us to dream of where we want to be.

The problem with change is not change – the problem with change is **<u>us</u>** – **when we fail to change in the face of change.**

Let me take us back to the freeway analogy for a moment. If our response to the big rig swerving into our lane is to just continue driving as if nothing happened we'd slam into that truck and cause a pile up on the 405. No, when something changes in our life we have to change to face it, in the motto of the US Marines – improvise, adapt and overcome.

The best example from Jewish history is the period immediately after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem a cataclysmic event in the Jewish conscience that rivals anything wall street or main street have thrown our way this year. In the year 70*ce* the walled city of Jerusalem was attacked and its holy temple – the center and touchstone of Jewish religious life was destroyed. The Jewish community had three responses – two groups the Sadducees and the Zealots who made up the priests and temple cult – fought and died first in Jerusalem and then later on Masada in defense of the sacrificial practices that made up Judaism of the day – they could not envision a world beyond the ritual they knew and died along side it – they drove head long into the back of the truck.

The second group – made up of just about everyone else in the Jewish community of the day assimilated and blended in to the surrounding roman culture. Their response to change was to abandon their own identity and become something completely different and other. They pulled quickly to the side of the road, got out of the car, threw the keys away and started walking in the other direction.

The third response was by a small ancillary group called the Pharisees. They saw change as an opportunity – fled Jerusalem and setup a *Yeshiva* – a school of Jewish study in a town called *Yavneh*. There they wrote the *Mishnah* – the code of Jewish law which had at its core the major innovation that Judaism no longer needed to be a temple based religion – but could exist and thrive outside the walls of Jerusalem where the study of Torah and the introduction of prayer would replace sacrifice as the medium through which Jews encountered God. In case you were wondering it is the basis for the Judaism we practice today. In the metaphor of the freeway; they changed lanes, took the next off ramp and found a better, safer way to arrive at the same intended destination – a relationship with God.

That is what our present circumstance requires of us today. With our world micro and macro in varying degrees of turmoil – we need to embrace change as an inevitable part of life – and allow it to push us towards a new path that will lead us where we hope to end up. **It's when we fail to change in the face of change that we get run off the road of life.** But this is the time of change – this is the season of *t'shuvah* of changing and turning, of reflection and new direction. We are on the road of life and its here – in shul – that we ask for directions. Lets put it in gear and move on down the road.

[i] When Everything Changes, Change Everything: In a Time of Turmoil, a Pathway to Peace, by Neale Donald Walsch