

From the Rabbi's Desk  
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**D'var Torah for Kol Nidrei**

**5782**

Q: How many Jews does it take to change a light bulb?

A: 30. One to change the bulb & 29 to discuss it and give contradictory advice to the person changing the bulb.

Q: How many Reform Rabbis does it take to change a light bulb?

A: None, anyone can change it whenever they want to.

Q: How many Conservative Rabbis does it take to change a light bulb?

A: We need to form a committee.

Q: How many congregants does it take to change a light bulb in a synagogue?

A: CHANGE? You want we should CHANGE the light bulb? My grandmother donated that light bulb!!!

Q: How many Ultra-Orthodox Rabbis does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Change? Who needs change?

Tonight I would like to talk about one of my favorite topics: change.

Talking about change is easier than actually changing. That's the reason, perhaps, why every culture and religious tradition has plenty of jokes about changing light bulbs. Yes, a few of the jokes have to do with the light bulb itself, and a few others have to do with the particulars of each culture or religious tradition. However most of the jokes circle around the topic of change itself.

"Who needs change?" isn't very fashionable or politically correct these days, so perhaps you will hear a subtler "Why do you want to change it? – if it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

Others will argue, not unlike the Reform rabbi with our light bulb, that change is not a big deal, "that anyone can change whenever they want to," but we also know that when anyone can do it, nobody actually does it.

A formation of a committee to change the light bulb or to move any change forward, will definitely delay the change if not kill it completely. After all, we all know too well that one of the best ways to kill an idea is to form a committee to discuss it.

Most of us became experts in resisting change, in eluding change, in delaying change. Do you know why the comfort zone is called the comfort zone? Because you are comfortable there, and why leave a zone where you are comfortable?

Research shows that slightly changing your routine, for example changing occasionally the way you walk from home to work, stimulates the brain. And yet, very few people will try it. Our routines are traced almost to the detail and small insignificant changes make us uncomfortable to the extent that most people change only when they have to, when they don't have a choice.

When Helene Jacob and I put together the programs for the month of Elul, we decided to include a series on change in popular culture, focusing on music, theater, and film.

Bradley Richman, a film aficionado, put together a very professional and ambitious program on how and why characters change within a film. Without being an expert on the subject, I was able to think of a couple of examples and I called Bradley before his presentation, thinking he might be able to use a little help (actually before I was able to reach Bradley I was planning to do the presentation myself). Bradley liked my examples and remarked: in every good movie, the character is confronted with a situation that prompts him or her to change. Something happens, usually at the core of the movie, that establishes a before and an after.

What is that “something” that prompts film characters to change? What moves all of us, sooner or later, to leave our comfort zone in order to embark in a journey towards the unknown, towards an uncomfortable feeling of uncertainty?

I like to propose that one of the main reasons people change, even when they don't want to, is because they are suffering. Suffering could be physical suffering (I couldn't take it any longer and I will finally undergo knee replacement), or emotional suffering (I opted for an early retirement before this job ends killing me).

People change when they feel lost, sad, lonely; when the intrinsic suffering of life, with its share of loss and disappointment, forces them to change.

We change when we try something many times and we realize it doesn't work, when we hit ourselves so many times on the wall that it finally hurts.

Here is an introduction to a short true personal story:

“Psychotherapy is a big part of life in Argentina. Since Argentinian culture sees therapy as important to self-development and positive health, there's plenty of demand to meet that supply.”<sup>i</sup>

When I was 19 years old I went to see a psychotherapist for the first time. I was dealing with a difficult situation and I was paralyzed, unable to take action. My therapist told me, “You will see, when you get tired from suffering, you will take action.” And she was right.

Definitely, most people change not because they want to, but because they have to.

We change when we lose loved ones, when the place we used to call home is no longer safe.

Some people change when they face their own mortality. If we talk about films, think of billionaire Edward Cole (Jack Nicholson) and car mechanic Carter Chambers

(Morgan Freeman) in the film *The Bucket List*, or think about how Matthew Poncelet (Sean Penn) reaches repentance in the eve of his execution in the film *Dead Man Walking*.

Sometimes we change because someone we love and who loves us, someone we respect and admire, points out to us that things don't have to be the way they are. A good friend, a teacher, a spiritual leader, a life-couch, or a psychotherapist, could help us move from where we are to where we ought to be.

Indeed, people change when they are exposed to kindness, when good people, pure souls, soften their outer core and allow for their own true goodness to shine through. Again, many great films revolve around this topic.

Suffering, pain, facing our own mortality or that of one of our loved ones, and being exposed to kindness or to exceptional human beings, can be catalyzers for change. The main challenge is not to encounter suffering, loss, or pain (there is plenty out there) or even exceptionally kind people (just look around here and you will find them); the main challenge is to transform the above encounters into change.

Life in its complexity sends us plenty of messages to help us in our quest to become more sensitive human beings. The signs are in front of our eyes, if only we can attune our hearts to see them.

Tonight we embark on a journey with no distractions in sight. Not too much to do: no TV, no phones, not even eating and drinking. We are just spending a few hours with our fellow congregants, envisioning how to change, how to move from where we are to where we ought to be, in our personal lives, in our family lives, in our Jewish lives.

In this sacred hour, we ask You, HaShem to open our eyes, to help us see the signs that point the way to a happier, healthier, and more meaningful life. And once we

see the signs, we ask You HaShem to give us the strength to change, to transform our noble dreams and projects into action.

May each of us and our loved ones be inscribed and sealed in the book of a good life, a healthy, sweet, peaceful and meaningful life. Amen.

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Almost everyone in Buenos Aires is in therapy. In: [www.qz.com](http://www.qz.com)