

The poet laureate of the 1960's youth generation, Bob Dylan, wrote the song that became the anthem of that turbulent decade of student activism and of civil rights and antiwar demonstrations, "The Times They Are A-changin'". No doubt, those who were involved in these movements felt that they were agents of momentous change, and the decade of the '60's did leave a significant imprint on the subsequent course of American history and politics. Change, however, is difficult to assess when one is living through the midst of it, and the impact of any specific interval of time is best measured in retrospect. Moreover, truth be told, the times are always changing. As that old cliché would have it, the only constant in life is change.

Change occurs on many levels and involves many aspects of our lives –our social mores, the medical treatments and procedures available to us, the way we shop, do business and travel, the way we communicate, the way we access, process and store information, the activities we engage in for entertainment, our ability to find employment appropriate to the skills and training we possess, the success and well-being of the voluntary institutions with which we affiliate, and the laws and regulations by which we are governed. Some changes in our lives seem strictly personal, while others reflect social and economic factors, national or global in their scope, and affect not only us but a wide swath of the population and even the entire country. Think back, if you are my age, to what life was like 40 or 50 years ago, and you will agree that it was strikingly different. How we live now reflects the cumulative changes that have occurred over the years; the times have indeed changed. As Americans, I might add, we are lucky; the changes we have experienced, though they have affected some for good and others for ill, can be managed through prudence and foresight, through social policy, and through the voluntary efforts of people of good will. I can't help but think of those, not so fortunate, who live in other regions of the world and whose lives have not only been changed but totally upended by violent political upheaval, corrupt government that favors the powerful and is unresponsive to the concerns of ordinary citizens, endemic poverty, rampant crime and natural disaster (in areas lacking the infrastructure of rescue and relief services we are accustomed to).

The New Year is an occasion to reflect on change. The *unetaneh tokef* prayer tells us that at this season of judgment, it is recorded who shall prosper and who shall be reduced to poverty, who shall enjoy tranquility and who shall be afflicted, who shall be raised up and who shall be humbled. One does not have to be a fatalist or accept the literal sense of the words to

recognize that unanticipated changes in our personal situation can and will occur, either gradually or in the wink of an eye. The general mood of the New Year festival is one of optimism and hope; prayer, repentance and charity can avert the evil decree. However, one can be forgiven a certain measure of anxiety and trepidation, when contemplating the changes that the coming months may bring.

As we think about the changes that have taken place over our lifetimes, there is always a temptation to idealize what was. Back then, people were well-mannered and respectful. They were patriotic. They supported their religious institutions, upheld the beliefs and practices of their faith tradition, attended church or synagogue regularly and dressed up for the occasion. The music, the shows on TV and stage, and the books, of course, were all much better than what today's popular culture provides us. I too succumb to that temptation, thinking back to the immediate post World War II era of my boyhood. My father's glazing business prospered, as did many other similar businesses, thanks to the postwar construction boom. Manufacturing jobs lifted many Americans out of poverty. And prosperity was more widely shared; disparities in wealth and income were much smaller than those that exist today.

The author of Ecclesiastes, however, admonishes us about this tendency to romanticize the past. "Don't say, how has it happened that former times were better than these? For it is not wise of you to ask that question." Recall that the Israelites during their wilderness sojourn looked back longingly on the time of their enslavement in Egypt, remembering not the taskmaster's lash and the backbreaking labor but the fleshpots and the fresh fish, fruits and vegetables they had to eat. The late 40's and the 50's may have been a time of tranquility and shared prosperity at home, but they were also the time of the Cold War (when we were scared of a possible nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union). Segregation of and discrimination against blacks was practiced throughout much of the country. Gays lived in the closet, fearful of blackmail and social opprobrium. Gender roles were more strictly defined, and women's ambitions for careers in business and in the professions were more often than not thwarted.

Religious fundamentalists too like to conjure up an imagined golden age of piety and devotion, from which contemporary society has strayed, and they strive to bring back that idealized time. Historians have a different tale to tell. Piety may not have been that deep-seated at all and may have been more a product of the milieu in which people were living and of the fact

that they had no other choices. European Jews in the pre-modern age lived behind ghetto walls, and, in the absence of a neutral, non-sectarian society outside, they could break with Jewish tradition only by taking the radical step of converting to Christianity. In both Christianity and Islam, alliances between religious leaders and ruling authorities also played a role in promoting adherence to religious doctrine and practice. This is not to demean faith or to question the sincerity of believers during ages past, but only to note the role played by social and political factors that can't or won't be replicated in our time. The non-fundamentalist, moreover, will note that devotion to faith, admirable as it may have been, was often tainted by intolerance and by harsh repression, not only of non-believers but also of those within the tradition who sought to interpret the teachings of faith in an independent manner.

At the Memorial Health System Center for Learning and Innovation, staff members at the time the facility was being constructed were encouraged to select their favorite quotations, which were then inscribed on the walls of various public spaces in the building to inspire and instruct students and passers-by. When I toured the Center recently, the quotation that caught my eye noted that “change is inevitable but working with change is what being creative is about.” Rosh Hashanah marks the birthday of Creation and acclaims the Creator as Sovereign of the Universe. We humans are accountable to God. Because our knowledge and our powers are limited and finite, it is appropriate for us to show humility in the presence of the Divine. However, having been fashioned in the Divine image, we do share in God's creative powers. That creativity can be employed to ameliorate the effects of past changes that have had an adverse impact on our fellow persons and on our communities and to anticipate and manage prudently changes that may transpire or that may be necessary to implement in the future.

We read a great deal in our media about the changes wrought by globalization, outsourcing and automation and about the erosion of the middle class in America. I am uncertain how we address the concerns of those who have been hurt by these changes and who have experienced a loss of economic and social status as a result and how we might remedy their situation. What I do know is that the solution is not to be found in stoking the fires of rage, brandishing simplistic slogans, or making unrealizable promises to turn back what is irreversible and restore what once was. Creativity may lie instead first of all in compassion and acknowledgment of the hurt that has been sustained and subsequently in a pragmatic approach

that is not beholden to rigid ideologies and that is grounded in an appreciation for the complexities and nuances of public policy.

Rather than complacently accepting that when change occurs, some will emerge as winners and others as losers, our faith enjoins us to regard ourselves as part of a community and to see ourselves, all of us, as dependent on each other. Every single one of us at one time or another during our lives will be in a situation of need. The Midrash likens the world to a wheel from which two buckets are suspended to draw water from a well. At the same time that one bucket is being filled, the other is being emptied; but subsequently, with the next turn of the wheel, the situation is reversed. Moreover, according to our tradition, even one who enjoys good fortune throughout life is in a sense dependent on the less fortunate individual for the opportunity to perform an act of *tzedakah*.

Israel too has experienced significant changes since my first time there in 1967-68 during my junior year at Seminary. The country, which was still relatively poor and just emerging from times of economic austerity fifty years ago, is now a high-tech superpower and far more receptive to American cultural influences. The Labor party and its coalition partners were dominant during the first thirty years of statehood, while the current government is more hawkish on issues of security and foreign policy and more supportive of free enterprise and the private sector. The once formidable military threat from the armies of neighboring Arab states is now virtually non-existent, while Iran, which does not have a contiguous border with Israel, and non-state actors (Hezbollah in Syria and Lebanon and ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates in Sinai) pose a much greater danger. There are tacit alliances, unthinkable in the past, with moderate and pro-Western Arab regimes, whose fear of terrorism and of the Iranian push for dominance in the region overrides their opposition to the existence of a Jewish state. *Charedim*, the various ultra-Orthodox groups within Israel, have become a large and growing proportion of the country's Jewish population and have taken over control of the Chief Rabbinate and the Jewish religious establishment. Hostility to Israel has always existed through the years in the Arab and Muslim world and in certain quarters on the political left but has taken on a particularly nasty tone in recent times with harassment of Jewish students on college campuses, shunning and boycotts of Israeli academics, threats of divestment and sanctions, and spurious and outrageous allegations of genocide. Some of the changes I've mentioned – Israel's military and economic strength –

have been for the better; others are problematic and pose a challenge for Israel's leaders, policy-makers and supporters. And, of course, the single biggest challenge remains the long-standing concern for preserving Israel's Jewish and democratic character in the absence of a resolution of the conflict with the Palestinians.

I can't speak for the Jewish Diaspora as a whole, but in America both the situation of Jews and the character of our Jewish loyalties and affiliation have also been subject to change. We are more prosperous, more successful, more integrated into American life and more assimilated than our immigrant forebears could ever have dreamed. But apart from the 10% give or take of the community that are Orthodox, the Judaism that is emerging will not be our parents' Judaism. Surveys of the American Jewish population in recent years have noted an increase in the number of those who declare themselves "Jews of no religion." This parallels what has been called "the rise of the nones", the growing number of young Americans who, when asked their religious preference or affiliation, reply "none." Millennials, the generation of young people born during the last two decades of the twentieth century, are not joiners. They seek experiences rather than long-term affiliation. They don't reject their Jewishness but see it as one element or ingredient among many in their identity rather than their defining essence. They are not hostile to religion but they view it more in terms of spirituality rather than of denominational membership. I believe that our young people are aware or will become aware that a singular focus on materialistic pursuits cannot provide the basis for a life of meaning and purpose. The challenge for rabbis and for Jewish leaders and educators is to provide them with the Jewish experiences they want, to reframe prayer, ritual and Jewish learning in terms that are intellectually honest and relevant to them, and to direct them to the Jewish texts and practices that are to be found in the treasure house of our tradition that will answer their craving for spirituality.

Last but certainly not least in terms of what is on the minds of everyone in our local Jewish community are the efforts that are currently being made toward a consolidation of our two synagogues. The future of Jewish life in Springfield has featured prominently on our Jewish communal agenda for close to a decade and a half. Serious efforts to augment cooperation between the congregations, promote joint activities, and consider a shared facility for the two synagogues and possibly a consolidation were undertaken in the Fall of 2008. Those who initiated the discussions at that time and many in the community as well recognized that because

of the changes that had occurred in the demographics of the community (dwindling synagogue membership rolls, fewer Jews moving to Springfield, our young people moving away after college, and an aging population in both congregations), cooperation between the synagogues and ultimately consolidation would be necessary in order to assure the continuity of Jewish religious life in Springfield. However, change is difficult - all of us have a natural tendency to want to perpetuate the situations and arrangements to which we have grown accustomed and with which we are comfortable. Cooperation and joint endeavors were non-controversial, but sharing a facility and/or planning for consolidation met resistance. Ultimately, the committee appointed to continue the discussions reached a point of gridlock, and the talks were discontinued. The resumption of discussion in recent months and the dedicated efforts by the six person Joint Temples committee to gather and disseminate information regarding demographics, finances, and the condition of both Temples' buildings reflects the recognition that this is a change that can no longer be resisted. Our situation now (much more so than was the case eight years ago) warrants, indeed compels that conclusion. As you know from the joint letter Rabbi Datz and I published in both Temple bulletins, I favor a consolidation, and I believe that it must be achieved while both synagogues are in a position of relative strength. As the discussions proceed, there will be many items of contention, which I don't propose to enumerate now. Also, in two-way talks, there is an inclination to be a partisan of and an advocate for the way things are done within our own particular faction or institution. But all of this pales in comparison to the reality we face – the bleak future prospects for both congregations, if we fail to come together. Our joint letter emphasized that consolidation does not have to be a zero sum game and that creative ways can be found to honor the legacies, the traditions and the cultures of both congregations.

We Jews have had a long history of coping with change. The destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE, the end of the Davidic monarchy, and the exile of Jews to Babylonia brought about vast changes in the situation of the Jewish people and posed a grave threat to Jewish continuity. Likewise, the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE at the hands of the Romans, the accompanying loss of political sovereignty, and the dispersion of Jews around the world. And closer to our own time, the Emancipation of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, by tearing down the ghetto walls and enabling Jews to participate in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the general community, constituted a different type of challenge – how to

maintain Jewish identity and continuity in a free society and in the absence of external compulsion. Prophets, Sages and communal leaders were able to respond to these challenges and work creatively within the framework of changing circumstances.

As Americans, as citizens of a globalized world, as participants in a religious tradition, and as Jews in this wonderful, warm, caring and supportive Jewish community of Springfield, we have witnessed and experienced changes. Let us deal with change confidently, harnessing our vision and our creativity to the betterment of our community and our nation, the enhancement of dignity and opportunity for all, and the preservation of our ancient heritage of faith.