



Congregation B'nai Israel

53 Palisade Avenue • Emerson, New Jersey 07630
201-265-2272 • www.bisrael.com • www.RabbiDebra.com

Making the Year New:

A “Cheat Sheet” for Change to Keep Ourselves Honest

Rabbi Debra Orenstein - Congregation B'nai Israel, Emerson, NJ - bisrael.com - RabbiDebra.com

If your self-perception doesn't (yet) include your change, or if there are commitments pulling you in another direction, it's important to make those countervailing forces conscious, so that you can address them. Here is one technique from *Immunity to Change* by Kegan and Lahey. Consider the following questions and steps:

1. State your goal. E.g., I want to complete a draft of my novel in the next year.
2. List all the behaviors you engage in that work against your goal. E.g., a) I don't set limits on helping other authors; b) I watch TV; c) I don't get enough sleep; d) I don't put writing into my schedule
3. For each behavior you list, imagine doing the opposite of it. What are you uncomfortable with or afraid of? E.g., I would offend people by setting limits; b) I am afraid I will never get a chance to relax if I don't watch TV; c) I don't have time to finish all my commitments because I spent time sleeping; d) I feel hopeless, because if I write I will neglect other important things that I am already committed to.
4. Notice how brilliantly your choices have been protecting you, at least in a certain way.
5. State your fears/discomfort as a commitment. You are likely to notice competing commitments. It's as if you are driving forward with one foot on the gas, and one foot on the brakes. E.g., a) I am committed to making myself available to other writers; b) I am committed to having free time; c) I am committed to staying up and finishing everything even if it's at the last minute and costing me; d) I am committed to not overwhelming myself by looking at my schedule, and I am committed to fitting everything in.
6. Can you articulate the major impulses you notice as axioms or assumptions that you are making? I must set boundaries and breaks, and I must not set them. I must finish everything, and I can't finish everything. My value (as a writer and mentor to writers) depends on my productivity. I judge myself to be wanting. Others will judge me to be wanting.
7. Can you imagine different or more all-embracing axioms that would empower you? Fill in your own ideas here for an aspiring novelist and change-maker!

As someone takes account within himself, so he is. - Proverbs 23:7

8. Intentionally alter your behavior from question 2 - *not* with a focus on achieving the change you want, but with a focus on confirming or revising your assumptions and axioms. Observe what happens. Now, you are not just changing behavior. You are transforming (formerly unarticulated) assumptions. You are on your way to changing your mind and identity.

We will do it, and we will [come to] understand. – the Children of Israel upon being offered the Torah

Thought Experiments Can Be Helpful for Change

- What would you do if you knew you had six months to live?
- What would you do if you had only today?
- What would you do if you knew you could not fail?
- Imagine that all the sins and all good deeds in your life and in the entire world are in perfect balance. Now imagine that your next action will tip the scales definitively either toward life/creation/hope or toward death/destruction/guilt. What do you feel at the moment of choosing? How do you choose? What action do you take?
- Imagine yourself at your 100th birthday, celebrated and surrounded by people you love who love you. Your life has unfolded as well as it possibly could. You worked hard and succeeded at accomplishing all your major goals and aspirations, including the changes you wanted to make. You are filled with gratitude and feel satisfied because you have met and even exceeded your fondest wishes and dreams for your life. What was achieved? What went so well? What were the key elements (attitudes, behaviors, people) that helped you?
- If you could completely eliminate one element of your behavior or attitude in order to support positive change now and in the future, what would you eliminate?
- If you could consistently do one thing in your life that would support positive change, now and in the future, what would that be?

Reading About Change Is Not the Same As Changing

Narcotized dysfunction occurs when people become so immersed in a particular topic that their immersion renders them numb and apathetic. In the end, they substitute knowledge for action. A widespread current example is that people follow the news 24/7, and so they feel as if they have done something about it. But in fact, they are often less engaged in the public sphere than formerly, because all they do is sit on the couch and watch the news obsessively!

The danger over High Holidays is that we will immerse ourselves in the language of change and become narcotized – lulled to sleep – instead of awakened.

[The blowing of the Shofar] has a holy hint in it, as if to say, “Wake up, sleepers, from your sleep, and those who have fallen into slumber, arise from your slumber. Search your deeds, and return in repentance, and remember your Creator. [You] who forget the truth in the vain passing of time, and who mistakenly use all their years in vanity and emptiness, which neither help nor save, examine your souls and improve your ways and motivations.” - Maimonides, *Hilchot Teshvuah*, 3:4

The High Holidays are designed to sensitize us to the gift of life and to the need for change. May you greet the New Year with renewed energy to renew yourself and to repair the world!



לְשָׁנָה טוֹבָה
To a good year! To a good change!
לְשָׁנוֹת אֶת-דִּרְכֶּךָ - to change your way - Jeremiah 2:36



All the ideas on this reminder card are supported by both ancient Jewish sources and contemporary social science research. Each was (or will be) discussed during a High Holiday sermon in 5780/2019.

Choose Change Prayerfully and Mindfully

What is one change, in your locus of control, that would make a meaningful and positive difference in your year and your life?
Expand your focus: what are two or three such changes?

- Take time for self-reflection and ask God for guidance before deciding what to change.
Commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still. - Psalms 4:5
- Dare to ask the people closest to you: “What do you think I need to change?”
With a multitude of counselors, there is victory. - Proverbs 11:14
- Consider making up to three changes at a time - but only if a) they work together and support one another and b) you feel hopeful, rather than overwhelmed.
The world stands [is balanced] on three things. - Mishnah Avot 1:2, 18

Vet your Choice(s): Will It/They Make a Significant Difference?

On a scale of 1-10 (10 = most important), how important is this change to you?

- Why wasn't your number lower?
- Having taken account of feedback from others, can you say that this change is truly something you want for yourself, irrespective of anyone else's opinions or expectations?
- If, upon reflection, your number is not 8.5 or higher and if you cannot say that you want the change for yourself, choose a different change for now.

If I am not for myself, who will be for me? - Hillel, *Mishnah Avot 1:14*

On a scale of 1-10 (10 = perfectly aligned), how much does the change align with Torah values?

- Why wasn't your number lower?
- What mitzvot and/or Jewish ideals does each change depend on and/or promote?
- Ask yourself “Why?” multiple times to get at deeper reasons. E.g.,

Why do I want to exercise? So I can be healthy. Why? So that I have energy. Why is it important to have energy? With that answer, you begin to get to a compelling “why” - a values-based mission about where, wherefore, and for whom you want to deploy your life force.
And if I am [only] for myself, what am I? - Hillel, Mishnah Avot 1:14

Vet your Choice(s): Are You Ready To Make This Change - or Not Yet?

On a scale of 1-10 (10 = certain), how confident are you that you will succeed in carrying out this change?

- Since the idea of this change is probably not new, why haven't you given up?
- What personal strengths can you draw on that might help with this change?
- When have you successfully changed in the past? How can your past victories with change inform your approach to this new change?
- How are you going to make this change? Ask yourself “how” at least five times. Go into detail. Drill down into each procedure. E.g., I want to purify my speech. How? By not listening to gossip. How? By changing the subject if gossip comes up. How? By having a non-shaming/non-blaming request memorized. How else will I purify my speech? Etc. In this way, you create a personalized plan.
- Take the time to write some notes about the bulleted items above and/or to discuss them with someone who supports you. After that, if you do not rate yourself an 8 or higher, you have two choices:
- Select another worthy goal, which you feel more ready to tackle OR
- Make your existing goal smaller. Choose a tiny step that moves you toward your goal, so that you are confident (8 out of 10 or higher) that you will achieve that step.
And if not now, when? - Hillel, Mishnah Avot 1:14

State Your Change

It's as easy as A,B,C.

Affirm: State your change in terms of what you want - not what you don't want. If you want to avoid or restrict a habit, what will you do instead? Write out your goal in positive terms and keep a written version in view.
The problem with making mental notes is that the ink fades very rapidly. - Rolf Smith, The Seven Levels of Change

Buddies: Whom can you tell right away who will be supportive and kindly “noodge” you? Share your planned change with a good friend or spouse; be cautious about splashing your intention on social media. For long term support, consider creating an ongoing check-in system with a chevruta, i.e., a study and/or accountability partner. Remember Mimi Silbert and the Delancey Street enterprises. Who will be your minyan? Assemble a formal or informal change group or join the CBI Change-makers.

If you would like to learn more about joining CBI Change-makers (either in person or remotely), please contact rabi@bisrael.com.

Checklist: Frame change in a “S.M.A.R.T.” way:

- **Specific** - Customize and provide detail and focus for what may start out as generic or general goals such as “I want to take better care of myself, help others, be more productive, grow, live my purpose, explore Judaism and spirituality.” What specific change do you wish to create?
- **Measurable** - How will you know if you succeed? What markers and metrics are worth noticing and celebrating?
- **Achievable** - choose a “stretch” goal within your area of control, not a pipe dream.
- **Relevant** - include what is relevant to your Jewish values and your personal calling.
- **Time-based** - what are your launch date, benchmarks, deadlines?

For Energy Out of the Gate - Gently, Kindly, and Quickly Begin Making A Change

Take the tiniest positive step you can conceive right away in the direction of your dreams! What is a small, even trivial, initial action that will advance the change you want to create? If two things come to mind, choose what is smaller and easier. Take or schedule that step now - or as soon as possible.

Make the initial change so small that it is trivial to do, and there is no point resisting it. If you want to study a chapter of Bible a day, then on day 1, put your Bible near your coffee maker. On day 2, read one word in your Bible after you take your first sip of coffee. On day 3, do the same. If you must read more, read up to a sentence, but not more than that for the first week.

Tiny changes eliminate the need for willpower (which is an expendable resource), reinforce your “why-power” and give you clear “way-power,” a path ahead.

- Notice: does your initial step raise your confidence, encourage you, or activate hope in any way? If not, continue to the next bullet. - If so, celebrate and feed that! Repeat the first step, if appropriate; take another tiny, even trivial, step; or schedule a time to do so.
- Notice: does your initial step make you uncomfortable, challenge your self-perception, or worry you in any way? - That doesn’t feel wonderful, but it is valuable information. Pay attention: how could you honor and address your discomfort, worry, or perception while still moving forward? Take your next tiny step.

For Endurance - Map Out a Longer-Term Plan for Changing

Schedule 30-60 minutes when you can review this entire “cheat sheet” in more detail. Make a plan for when and how you will implement - and track - your change in its first 30 days.

Do not say, “when my schedule opens up, I will study [or change],” lest you never study [or change]. - Hillel, *Mishnah Avot*, 2:4

Put reminders on your phone and/or in your calendar for the changes you plan, including the tracking you will do. (See below.)

Schedule a weekly time to assess your progress and ask yourself: What is working well with my change? What needs adjustment?

Change or Die: Support Yourself with Judicious Doses Fear, Trembling, and Awe

Practice Repentance out of Fear. Teshuvah Meiyirah.

This is also called Repairing Harm/Evil, Tikun Hara.

- Humility is your holy root (since you are created in the mere image of God, Malkeynu, King).
- Arouse your emotions & sense of urgency - Feel the pain of what is missing, unfulfilled, or wrong - Cut through denial (face tough truths and cultivate hope) - Remember: you fear change, but you also fear not changing!

If you don’t change your beliefs, your life will be like this forever. Is that good news? - W. Somerset Maugham

- If you were deeply afraid and absolutely needed to make the change that you are now contemplating, whom would you contact? Where would you spend time? What would be your keystone attitude and/or behavior? What would you alter in your environment?

Change and Really Live: Support Yourself with an Unlimited Supply of Abundant Love

Practice Repentance out of Love, Teshuvah Meiahava.

This is also called Uplifting (and transforming) Harm/Evil, Ha’alat Hara

- Grandeur is your holy reach (since you are created in the image of God, Avinu, Father).
- Imagine a positive future - Approximate it; take baby steps - Love yourself forward - Leverage your love for God, people, and values - Fall in love with your intention - Remember: your ingrained patterns and resistance are also born of love. You have been trying to cope and to protect yourself. Now, love yourself through the change.

The power of repentance is such that when we repent out of love, our malice is transformed into merit. - Rabbi Yirachmiel Yisrael Danziger, *Yismach Yisrael*

- If you deeply loved yourself and fervently wanted to make the change that you are now contemplating, whom would you contact? Where would you spend time? What would be your keystone attitude and/or behavior? What would you alter in your environment?

In Important Ways, Fear and Love Lead to the Same Conclusions

Fear says, “You’ll never do it. You will backslide.”

Love says, “I want to protect you from investing in something unsustainable and from feeling that your efforts are futile.”

Both agree: Track and measure your progress!

- How will you do so? On your phone? In a journal?

Fear says, “You will be deprived or hurt.”

Love says, “I want to encourage and support you.”

Both agree: Reward yourself - in a healthy and proportionate way - for your progress.

- Plan rewards in advance: what inspires you and is compatible with your change?

- What do you need to have in place, in order to give yourself timely rewards?

Fear says, “This will never work. You’ve tried before.”

Love says, “I hate to see you disappointed.”

Both agree: You need proof and hope! Orchestrate quick, small wins, especially at the start of implementing your change.

- Link the change you want to make to something you *know* you will do, such as driving to work or brushing your teeth.
- Then create a formula that is specific and memorable: E.g., Right after I close the driver’s side door and before I put the key in the ignition, I will... As soon as I replace my toothbrush in its holder, I will...

Expect Obstacles, Interruptions, Derailments, and Resistance

Consider the following:

- Is there is a time (by day, week, month, or occurrence) when you are most vulnerable to lapsing on your change?
- Is there a place or type of environment where you are most vulnerable to lapsing on your change?
- Are there particular people with whom you are most vulnerable?
- How might you engineer your time and travels, and adjust your conversations and company, to avoid those pitfalls?
- Select a neutral or helpful behavior(s), which you genuinely enjoy, that you can substitute for the change you wish to create when your willpower is depleted. E.g., I am tempted to binge Netflix instead of studying now, so I will take 15 minutes and go for a walk, listen to music, meditate, clean my closet, etc.

A bend in the road is not the end of the road, unless you fail to make the turn. - Helen Keller

Create a “Slip Plan”

If you can catch yourself before doing something that goes against your change, you have some choices:

- Adjust your change plan. If you realize that you can’t or won’t, under the circumstances, follow through on your change plan, renegotiate the agreement you made with yourself. What small step can you take? E.g., set a reminder for a make-up session on your phone or leave a text message for your accountability partner letting them know what happened.
- Postpone or minimize what you are about to do - e.g., wait out the urge to undermine your plan. Delay action on your impulse by 15 minutes and distract yourself in the meantime; most urges are fleeting. Substitute the neutral or helpful behavior that you chose in advance (see above). Alternatively, do/eat/say half of the unhelpful behavior you are tempted to do, instead of all. Or set a timer and do the unhelpful behavior for a specific amount of time.
- Call a friend or accountability partner for support or advice.
- Log your misstep. Hopefully, you are keeping a log (on your phone or on paper) to track processes and metrics that are leading you to your change. If you record a departure from your plan, you are consistent in fulfilling the logging portion of your plan! This gives you both useful information and positive momentum.

Once you have slipped, you also have some choices:

- Credit yourself for the awareness! Yashar Koach for noticing! Re-remind yourself that slips are part of the process of changing. Every attempt at change - even a partial, interrupted, or failed attempt - creates new neural pathways. Your next attempt will have more experience behind it. Forgive yourself, and...
- Examine the slip for clues as to how to improve your change plan. Refine it accordingly.
- Choose a tiny, almost trivial, step toward the change you wish to create. Take it right away if at all possible. If not, schedule it immediately.

Change Your Day, Change Your Life

Some of the most powerful changes any of us can make are changes in daily practices. A daily activity that increases healthfulness, responsibility, kindness, productivity, or mindfulness by even 1% will yield amazing results over time.

Start tiny. Add one prayer, add one mitzvah, add one smile, add one affirmation, add one deep breath. It sounds trivial. But if you maintain and even slightly expand your daily practice, the trajectory of your life will be different and better.

You don’t have forever to honor your dreams. But you do have now.

– Bronnie Ware, author of *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*

You can also focus on special days. Change your Shabbat to increase joy, freedom, and connection, or make the first day of each month a time when you engage in a specific, positive practice.

Living 24/6 feels like magic, and here’s why: it seems to defy the laws of physics, as it both slows down time and gives us more of it. - Tiffany Slain, author of *24/6*

Changes in Thought, Action, and Identity

Change happens on many levels - in behavior, emotion, thought, and spirit. The Rabbinic idea of teshuvah (repentance) is that genuine change will change your very identity. A person who repents is - spiritually speaking - “not the same person” as the one who sinned.

Do not say that there is [need for] repentance only with respect to sins that are deeds, such as fornication, violent robbery, and theft. Just as a person needs to repent of sins [of action] so he needs to examine and repent of any evil dispositions, such as explosive anger, hatred, jealousy, quarrelsomeness, cynicism, [greedy] pursuit of money, honor, or food, and the like. Of all these, one needs to repent. These [attitudes] are harder [to repent of] than sinful acts, for, when one is sunk into them, it is difficult to separate from them. And thus [Isaiah] said, “Let the wicked forsake his way and the man of iniquity his thoughts [55:7].” - Maimonides, *Hilchot Teshuvah*, 7:3

Identity is an important factor in fearing and resisting change, too. Who would I be, without this habit/condition I wish to change? What would be disrupted in my life and my identity if I were to change? Whom would I “betray” if I changed? Remember: Selfhood wins out over self-management every time.

With a new goal in life, a person assumes new identity. Aims and aspirations are such major expressions of the personality that renouncing them amounts to a severance of the old self. The moment of turning thus involves not only a change of attitude, but also a metamorphosis. – Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz