

## EREV ROSH HASHANA 5779

Several years ago, our family went down to Charleston, South Carolina for a short vacation. One of our kids, used to the intense rhythm of Manhattan life, couldn't take the laid-back pace of Charleston and literally needed to take refuge in a nearby Starbucks.

Those of us who have lived outside of the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area know that life elsewhere often runs at a different speed. For much of human history, the pace of life was quite slow. While the cast of characters changed periodically, the essential aspects of daily life on planet Earth did not.

There have been moments, however, when that change suddenly jolted society out of its comfort zone. The invention of the printing press in 1440 was one such moment. The Industrial Revolution was another. The Enlightenment and the social revolutions in France, America and elsewhere loosened the grip which religion had on much of the world.

Change began to accelerate at an ever-increasing rate. We freed the slaves, discovered electricity, invented automobiles, movies, had two world wars, integrated society, moved from black and white TV to color TV to cable TV and, increasingly now, to no TV.

There were no cell phones on the sitcom “Seinfeld,” which ended its run in 1998. It was less than twelve years ago that Steve Jobs introduced the iPhone. Change is now so rapid that we have to understand if some people cannot or simply refuse to keep up with it.

Forty years ago, gays and lesbians were commonly viewed as social deviants and, in some places, criminals. Today, many gays and lesbians are among the most prominent and respected members of society, while gay marriage is legal and well on the way to being considered mainstream.

But then, the letters started to increase. Most people grew accustomed to G and L for “gay” and “lesbian.” However, then there was B for “bi-sexual,” Q for either “queer” or “questioning,” T for “transgender” and that doesn’t even include those who are non-binary, polyamorous and more. Many of those who thought they had a good grip on a changing world, now saw it rapidly slipping away from them.

Not only was there so much new in our world, even the old began to change radically. In 1963 and for decades after that, Bill Cosby (show album cover) was a very funny fellow. A generation later, he starred in one of the most successful shows on TV for eight years. Today, he is

defined as a “violent, sexual predator,” whose comedic masterpieces are not performed in public.

Joe Paterno and other legendary figures in the world of sports have had their records expunged and their names erased, as if they had never existed.

From O.J. Simpson to Harvey Weinstein, Gary Hart to David Petraeus, Tiger Woods to Dwight Gooden, Anthony Weiner to Pee Wee Herman, Matt Lauer to Louis CK . . . so many of those with amazing careers made terrible choices. Those who had been heroes and role models to so many were now viewed with scorn, humiliated and shunned by most who had once adored them.

The Jewish world is not immune to these changes as well. A popular synagogue on Manhattan’s West Side is named after a Hasidic rabbi whose musical melodies have captivated the Jewish world for the past half century. Yet Shlomo Carlebach was widely whispered about as a sexual predator for many years.

Carlebach’s musical creations, however, are among the best-known and most beloved in Jewish liturgy. We are faced with a dilemma: do we

discard the beloved music which we have sung here or can we separate the art from the artist?

Where do we draw the line? Should we refuse to patronize Hobby Lobby and Chick Fil-A because of the extreme right-wing views which their evangelical founders hold on social issues?

Do we refuse to patronize certain fast-food chains and local restaurant chains because of the social views of their owners?

Do we refuse to watch professional football because of the racial-injustice protests of players who kneel during the National Anthem? And how do we respond to Nike featuring Colin Kaepernick in a new media campaign?

The struggle over “to boycott or not” was illustrated clearly on a 1994 Seinfeld episode, in which Elaine falls madly in love with a delivery man. Having broken up with other men due to their position on abortion rights, progressive, emancipated Elaine hesitates to “ask the question.” When prodded to do so by Jerry, Elaine is crushed to hear the boyfriend answer, perhaps prophetically, “some day, we’re going to get enough people on the Supreme Court to change that law.”

How much do we know about the places we shop and what their views are on the issues of the day? Can we do business with someone whose core

values are so antithetical to ours? Is ignorance an excuse? How much do we ask and prod about the views of the people and the corporations which fill our tanks, our stomachs, our homes and our businesses?

In Israel, the music of one of the greatest operatic composers ever to live has been largely banned. Richard Wagner was a detestable anti-Semite, whose music and philosophy appealed deeply to Hitler, who had it played in many a concentration camp. It is for these reasons that Wagner's "Here Comes The Bride" is virtually never part of a Jewish wedding.

Of course, boycotts often fail to achieve their stated aim. The founding of the State of Israel led to a boycott of various products made in Israel or even sold in Israel. Most of these had little success and today, the boycott has little impact.

Similarly, in 1980, President Jimmy Carter called for a boycott of the Summer Olympics in Moscow unless the Soviet Union withdrew its troops from Afghanistan. While many nations joined in the boycott, the Soviet Union did not remove their troops for eight years.

On the other hand, the United Farm Workers of America began a boycott of California grapes fifty years ago. In the 1960's, more than fourteen

million Americans refused to buy grapes until a new contract was signed in 1970.

The State of North Carolina lost \$100 million in revenue, beginning in 2016, due to boycotts over a law which was seen as preventing LGBTQ people from using the public restrooms of their choice. As a result of the boycott, the law was repealed a year and a half ago.

When information is widely reported, it becomes impossible to ignore. So, just how much do we want to know about the food we eat, the people with whom we associate and the products that fill our homes? How much do we want to know about the racism and anti-Semitism of the authors whom we read or the songs we listen to or the shows we watch?

A few years ago, we hired a sofer, a Torah scribe, to check our Torah scrolls. He asked what our budget was, because for one price, he could do a good review of our scrolls. For a higher price, he could do a very thorough inspection and, undoubtedly, discover more problems.

Each of us, of course, will make our own judgments; we will apply our own standards. However, after discussing the issue with Cantor Marcy, we have affirmed that we will not knowingly play the music of Shlomo Carlebach at our services. He died back in 1994, long before American

society came to grips with the sins of sexual harassment and sexual abuse  
Remember, the whole “Me Too” movement began less than a year ago.

Carlebach was never charged with a crime, but many women have come forward to say what was previously only whispered, that they were abused by him or taken advantage of by him.

It is not our place to forgive one who has hurt so many. Forgiveness can only be granted by the one who was victimized. For many, the pain of hearing Shlomo Carlebach’s music is comparable to the pain of Holocaust survivors and their descendants when hearing Wagner’s music.

On this Day of Remembrance, we have the opportunity and the responsibility to take a stand on the moral, ethical and other issues which confront us. We take it upon ourselves to repair that which we are able to mend, even if it is difficult, even if it means letting go of something or someone we used to value.

It is by looking at the world through the eyes of others that we begin to mature and to change. “*Siz shver tzu zain a yid,*” yes, “it is difficult to be a Jew,” but it is also extraordinarily fulfilling to put forth the effort. As the Talmudic teachings of Pirkey Avot proclaim, “according to the effort is the reward.” AMEN