



SUSTAINING CHANGE

What happens when you leave the foxhole? Priorities and values are often most clear during times of risk. But as the risk lessens, what happens to our values? We turn to our values when we are under pressure, but what happens when the urgency dissipates?

There is a famous saying from Rav Yisroel Salanter: First I wanted to change the world, but that was too hard. So, I tried to change my country, and that was too hard as well. So, I tried to change my community, but I was unable. So, instead I decided to change myself.

When I studied in Yeshivat Har Etzion, Rav Yehuda Amital, had a clever sarcastic twist to this saying. He would say, “first I tried to change myself, but that was too hard—so instead I tried to change my community. But that proved too difficult. So, I decided to change the world.”

Ultimately, both directions are not only correct but mutually fortifying. The larger changes in the world in turn effect our own personal development and our own individual development is the building block for changing the world. But what matters most is not the ability to change but the ability to sustain change.

And this is the message of Shavuot. The giving of the Torah at Sinai was a moment where we all saw our essential values with clarity. We all changed at Sinai. But that was just the beginning of the story. Every year since, we symbolically return to Sinai on this holiday to recommit ourselves to those values.

We have all been through a great deal over the past year. And during this time, our priorities have become even more clear. We have searched for meaning, we have recalibrated how we spend our time and we have

reconnected deeply to those who we love. Please God, we are now seeing the beginning of a return to more normalcy in our daily lives. This new reality presents us with a new challenge and opportunity. During times of crisis, change emerges naturally due to the circumstances that surround us. But once the crisis passes, we need to work to sustain the change.

And this Shavuot is the time to reflect on how we integrate into our future what we have learned during this past year. The world changed this year, now it is our turn to think about how we change our society, our communities, and ourselves for the better — adding more joy and greater purpose to our lives and to all those around us.

Chag Sameach.



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