



## Change Your Password, Change Your Life

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I was an early adaptor of Waze, having experienced it on a trip to Israel years ago. Impressed with Israeli ingenuity, I've proudly used Waze as my constant companion anywhere I go.

Back when I had a dedicated GPS device in my car, I had selected a voice I preferred – a soft-spoken woman with an Australian accent whose soothing lilt made “turn left now” sound like a delightful suggestion rather than a command. But all these years later, I had no idea that you could actually change the voice on Waze. And boy, have I been missing out!

A few days ago, my kids asked me to change our voice. Suddenly, as I started up directions to summer camp drop-off, I heard not the standard, “All set, let’s go,” but (in cookie monster’s voice), “OK, Let’s go! Remember, safety first! Cookies second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth too...”

This may not be good for my diet, I thought, but it was spectacular for our drive. Suddenly the sleepy slog through Chestnut Hill became an adventure. My boys leaned in. When would Cookie speak again? What would he say? “Turn left at the light, remember to look for cookies – and cars too.” “Turn right, um num num num.”

By the time we got to camp, they could barely catch their breath, they were laughing so hard. They skipped in with smiles from ear to ear. I came back to shul humming.

What caught my attention was that the effect lingered. Throughout the day I found myself a bit more relaxed, a bit more tuned in. The morning’s laughter continued into the conversations I had all day. I found myself approaching challenges with a lighter tone.

When the boys came home, they enthusiastically shared that it had been a good day. A small and simple change set the tone for joy and transformed our whole experience.

Sometimes life requires big change. Sometimes, just a small tweak can make a profound impact.

I received an e-mail this week with bold letters and lots of exclamation points gushing, “How are you doing with your 2019 goal-setting?” The odd timing of asking that question now, in the middle of the summer, as we are arguably closer to 2020 than whatever goal-setting we might have done at the outset of 2019, kept me reading.

The e-mail continued, “I mean **big, epic goals**... As you think about what you’d like to achieve in the rest of 2019, I hope you’ll **supersize!**” But what if exactly the opposite is what’s called for?

In this week’s parasha, Moses finally gets the children of Israel to the edge of a new future in the promised land of Israel. It’s big. It’s epic. And it’s nearly a complete fail.

With great fanfare, Moses tells the Children of Israel: “You are all finally going into the land!” Two tribes, Gad and Reuven, respond: “Actually we like it here. It’s comfortable. The grass is greener. Our kids like it here. Israel’s nice, but it’s not really for us.”

Imagine Moses in that moment: “Are you kidding me?!”

He asks a clarifying question: What do you mean you don’t want to go? Ami Silver points out in the video podcast, AlephBeta, that to reassure Moses, the tribes respond with an answer that shifts Moses’ frame from, “This is just like the spies – déjà vu all over again!” to the resolute backdrop of Joseph and Judah. In that story, when Joseph challenges his brothers, are they going to treat Benjamin the way they treated him, Judah steps up with a different paradigm – I will take responsibility for my brother. So too, now, Reuven and Gad step up.

Hearing that echo of a different history, Moses can breathe again. He responds, “Okay, after you join the tribes to take Israel, you can settle here on the other side.” Then Moses makes one small change.

Gad and Reuven asked to stay. But Moses adds a tribe who did not ask to be there, Menashe. To make matters even stranger, Moses adds not the whole tribe, but half of them. Half will live in Israel, half on the other side.

What in the world was Moses thinking? Ami Silver points out that Menashe is descended from Joseph. By putting them on either side of the land, Moses is articulating an eternal pledge for the entire Jewish people to replicate not the spies' moment of fear and alienation, but rather the Judah and Joseph moment of unity. To always take responsibility for each other, no matter which side of the Jordan, because we are one tribe, one people.

A small change, a big idea. It is, in many ways, the first assertion of *K'lal Yisrael*. And it has shaped us as our defining principle for centuries: No matter where we are, inside Israel or outside Israel, we are one tribe.

One small change with the power to transform us all. What is true for our nation is true for us as individuals too.

I came across an article a few years ago that has stuck with me. It is called, "How a Password Changed My Life." The author, Mauricio Estrella, shared that back in 2011 he hit a particularly rough patch. He was in the middle of a divorce and dealing with a significant depression. One day, he came into his office and turned on his computer.

"Your password has expired," it read. Every month his work required employees to change their password with strict formatting requirements. To make matters worse, whatever string of letters and numbers he came up with was always hard to remember. One more thing to make life difficult. One more thing to weigh him down.

"I was furious that morning," he wrote. "I was late...I think I forgot breakfast... I need to get (things) done before my 10am meeting, and all I have in front of me is a huge waste of time. Then," he wrote, "I remembered a tip I heard from my former boss."

Use your password to change your life.

What did he mean? Instead of typing in a string of letters and numbers, choose a phrase that reminds you of something you are working on every time you log into your computer, every day.

Mauricio changed his password that morning to "Forgive@h3r."

“I wrote Forgive her,” he reflected, “every day, for a month. That simple action changed the way I looked at my ex-wife. That constant reminder...led me to accept the way things happened at the end of my marriage and embrace a new way of dealing with the depression that I was drowning into. In the following days, my mood improved drastically.”

By the end of the second week, he noticed that he was starting to become dulled to the impact, so he made another small change. Every time he typed in the password, he said to himself “I forgive her.” The healing effect of that forced focus was profound.

When the prompt appeared the next month “Your password has expired,” he asked himself, what was his next challenge? Every day, throughout the months that followed, his password reminded him that who he was and who he could be were not as far apart as he thought.

Here’s his reflection on the power of his passwords:

*Sleep@before12 • it worked.*

*Eat2times@day • it never worked, still fat.*

*Ask@her4date • it worked. I fell in love again.*

*Facetime2mom@sunday • it worked. I talk with my mom every week.*

And:

*Save4@ring. On Jun 21, 2014, he updated, “She said yes”*

Small tweaks change lives. That is true with positive changes, and it is also true in reverse.

Last October, I achieved a big bucket-list goal. As a kid, I could never pass the Presidential Fitness Test because, while I could run a mile, I could never do it under the required 10 minutes. To celebrate my birthday this past year, I ran a 10k with every single one of those 6.2 miles under 10 minutes.

But one day in April I didn't go for a run. I was busy. I could do it tomorrow. Then the next day the same. And the day after that.

Suddenly, it's August and I can't remember the last time I went for a run. So, this week I changed my password again:

Too many cookies. Time2go4@run!

What small change do you need to make right now? What is your next password?

Shabbat Shalom.