

# COMMENCEMENT CONTEMPLATIONS: HAS NOTHING CHANGED?

*by Nechama Stampler*

We started practicing for our graduation. There is not so much to practice; we basically walk in and sit there, until we have to stand up, get our diplomas and leave. During the rehearsal we lined up in height order so we could figure out where to sit. I sat down in my seat and realized that I was sitting next to the same people that I had sat with during our middle school graduation. For the most part, we were all in the same order. It was like nothing has changed, and yet at the same time so much has.

Nobody can go four years and still be exactly the same person, especially when those years are spent in school and especially when the person is going from being fourteen (still a kid) to eighteen (almost an adult). So much changes. Every once in a while my friends and I will talk about things that we did in previous years (especially eighth grade) and we end up rolling on the floor laughing. It's hard to believe we were actually like that.

It's not that one day you are one person and the next day you are completely different. Certain things cause drastic changes, but for the most part growth is gradual. Every experience shapes you. Everything you see, hear, feel, taste and smell changes the way you think. Normally you don't change in a big way, but something inside you is different and waiting to be developed as time goes on.

One day at lunch, I was sitting outside with my friends and we were talking about life, the future, and all those kinds of things. A teacher walked by and stopped to talk to us. "Do you have any advice for us?" somebody asked, without telling him what we were talking about. He thought about it for a minute and responded. "Don't just go with the flow. Don't let other people push you around. Make sure you are in a

position where you are not going to wake up one day and wonder how you got there." The advice was generic enough that it hit home for all of us in individual ways. However, if we are just being acted on by the experiences of our life, how can we guarantee that we won't look around one day and find ourselves completely off track?

There are two kinds of experiences, ones that we choose to have and ones that are out of our control. With the experiences that we choose, it's our responsibility to choose things that will influence us in the way we want to be influenced. Of course you can not always know for sure how something will impact you, you have to do your best to figure what is good for you. With the second kind of experiences, they are in the hands of Hashem. We don't get to decide whether it is a worthwhile experience, whether or not we want to be in that particular circumstance. We could just say that Hashem is shaping us and He knows what's best. While it is true that Hashem chose this experience for us and that He does know what is best, we still have a responsibility in these situations. With the knowledge that the experience (good or bad) is from Hashem and the understanding that every situation that He puts before us is in order to bring us closer to fulfilling our purpose, we must find a way to grow from the experience. In other words, just sitting through it isn't enough, because then we will have no control over how the situation changes us.

We have to go through the situation in a way that causes it to impact us the way we want to be impacted.

All growth is gradual. When my grandmother comes she always comments on how tall my brother is getting. I never notice because I see him everyday. Internal growth is the same way. It happens so slowly, one day you look back and realize how far you have come. Make sure to monitor the growth on a regular basis and pay attention to everything that happens to you so that when you look around you will be proud of who you have become.

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