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by Dina Neuman

Shortly before the first day of school, one of my progeny bursts into the house, red-faced and fists clenched. He says, "They're making a *salat* for my class!"

"Yum," I say, "that's so nice of them, enjoy it." But it rapidly becomes clear that he is not referring to a salad, because although he prefers ice cream, he doesn't generally get quite *that* upset when confronted with a bowl of mixed vegetables. A "*salat*," though I don't understand why, means that the two parallel classes are getting all mixed up, like a—*ooobbb, I get it now, ha!* creating two new classes out of the two old ones.

The red-faced child in question gets busy organizing a *hafganah* against the *salat*, which will have the benefit of keeping him busy during *bein hazmanim*, but it's probably not worth the emotional upheaval he is experiencing. Plus the audio abuse he is perpetuating against my ears. "Why!" he rails. "Why do bad *salats* happen to good-ish boys?"

Libby is the one who realizes that, in fact, *all* of my progeny will be starting off the new school year with a completely different class from the one they had last year. Each change is occurring for a different reason—for example, one is graduating, another has a class that's too large and is therefore splitting, switching schools, starting *yeshivah ketanah*—which is good, because if it was all for the same reason, it would be boring, plus also a lot easier, both of which are things that we, as a family, are firmly against.

As this sinks in, most of the kids are suddenly filled with extreme trepidation. The *salat*-slated progeny is in tears, thinking that he might walk into class on the first day of school and discover that he's not in the same class as his best friend, which is a real possibility, and maybe even a good reason to cry.

And so, here's a totally hypothetical question: If each of one's children will experience a drastic change in their class this year, then what is the cof-

fee-to-wine ratio one will need to imbibe on September 1? (Asking for a friend.)

Truth is, even when it's a regular, non-*salat* year, the first day of school can be hard. Change, even good change, can be very scary. And some of these changes don't even seem so good.

A writer friend of mine, Yocheved Rottenberg, who facilitates therapeutic journal writing, showed me her latest creation: a deck of cards for Elul. Printed on each card is a Torah truth as food for thought, as well as a writing prompt. The cards are meant to help you see that *teshuvah* is within your grasp by reminding you of the greatness that is in you right now.

It's a tall order for a set of cards; but then, I once tasted a cheesecake that made me believe that I wasn't lactose intolerant, which is a lesson of a very different kind that we shall save for another day.

Point is, the cards are beautifully done, so they made their way onto my dinner table, and my family flipped through them and stopped talking about the fact that half of them didn't want meatballs and spaghetti for dinner and instead started talking about time.

"The only way you can understand time," says my husband, "is because of change." He moves a cup slightly down the table to demonstrate. "See? If the cup would be static—if everything would be absolutely still—there would be nothing to show us that time was passing. We wouldn't *feel* it. But when there's *change*—we feel it."

Nobody is happy with this. Time is a *real* thing, everyone insists. It passes even if the cup stays in place! How can it not?

But for me, it's like a light turns on.

How can we be afraid of change? Neither the past, which we long for, nor the future, which we are therefore wary of, *actually exists!* We can only ever live in the place that *does actually exist*: in our greatness at this very moment. ●