

Rabbi Jessica K. Marshall
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Three quarters of all animal species undergo metamorphosis, a giant physical change in form and structure. Three quarters! Scientists ask, why? Why would evolution retain metamorphosis at all, why not just have a species show up as their final form? Why not be born a butterfly instead of a caterpillar?

Metamorphosis is extremely costly energetically and time-wise. It puts each creature under a lot of stress, energetically. And it takes a ton of time.

When a creature is sittin' there in its chrysalis, it's not moving, so anything can eat it—it's quite vulnerable.

Given all these downsides, why is metamorphosis so common in nature?

Why must creatures go through so much destruction, and rewiring, and remodeling, to become who they are?

I recently listened to a really interesting interview with Oren Harman, a historian of science. He shared two theories. The first that metamorphosis evolved because it reduces intergenerational conflict.

If I'm a caterpillar, I eat a specific food, or plant, that's my diet.

And when I graduate into a butterfly or a moth, I can fly anywhere.

So I'm not competing with my younger self for the same food.

Generations aren't vying with each other.

The second theory is that there's a trade-off evolutionarily between growth and differentiation.

There's a point where it's better to stop growing and begin differentiating.

For each species there's an optimal moment where it's better to stop eating and to start turning into who you're going to be.

There's a point when growth is no longer about taking in more, but about becoming more fully who you are.

This intersection of science and spirituality is always fascinating to me.

As I learn about the process of cutting generational ties, and differentiation, the life of a caterpillar sounds a whole lot like a certain someone's spiritual growth journey. 😊

At the beginning of our service we recited the Kol Nidre prayer. Kol Nidre literally means *All Vows* and is a soul beseeching appeal to release our vows.

This big, cathartic release feels a little similar to letting go of being a tadpole so you can turn into a frog. But the prayer itself is controversial.

Isn't it generally assumed keeping our vows is ideal??! Why would we want to release them?

Rav Jericho Vincent teaches that the vows we release on Yom Kippur are the commitments we made in childhood to stories that no longer serve us---limiting stories like "I'm not smart" or "I'm not lovable" or "I'll never heal."

Kol Nidre gives us a once-a-year opportunity to let these stories go.

This practice is a beautiful affirmation of spiritual freedom.

Judaism understands that we can get locked in place by old commitments, trapped, with no way to change or improve. The weight of past vows or failed resolutions is a burden, leaving us stuck.

As Rabbi Eliezer Simcha Weisz reminds us, change requires us to loosen our grip on the things that hold us back, both physically and spiritually.

This is the gift of Kol Nidre. We loosen our grip to grow and evolve.

This is so alive in my own life right now. I can see ways I hold onto old pain, old wounds, because at one time they served a function. When no one else was able to show up for me, I held onto what happened, as my own witness.

“If no one else is acknowledging this, at least I can affirm my own pain.” It makes a ton of sense. And it was important 20 years ago. Now it feels heavy.

Like I’m holding onto being a larva when I could be a butterfly.

So I invite us to sit with: **What are we each holding onto because we're afraid of who we'd be without it? What patterns or mental loops once protected us but now keep us stuck?**

Where are we keeping one foot out of the door so we can't be hurt as badly?

How are we the person who holds everyone else while rarely letting ourselves be held?

Where do we treat relaxation as something we earn, only after everything is handled.

When do we try to get another to acknowledge that what happened was wrong before allowing ourselves to move on?

Do we revisit old wounds because the pain is a way of staying connected to what we lost?

...Oooooof...growth.

So how do we actually release *kol nidre*, all these vows? How do we break out of the chrysalis?

My favorite simple formula is to see the **function** an old pattern served, and then get that need met in a healthier way.

We can say, "Thank you. You helped me survive. Now I get to choose something different."

Here are few more life-giving ways to shift out of the old patterns I just mentioned:

- Where might we risk letting ourselves be fully in—while trusting that we can care for ourselves if we get hurt?
- How might we practice receiving the care, support, and tenderness we so easily offer others?
- Might we allow ourselves to rest and enjoy pleasure simply because we are human—not because everything is done?
- Can we give ourselves the acknowledgement and validation we are waiting for someone else to provide?
- How might we honor what mattered to us, without needing to hold onto the pain?

Kol Nidre affirms, It's actually really important to do this. It is a sacred act to choose something different.

Take a moment now to **think about if there's a new way of being that you want to cultivate**. Just identify it....

The wisdom of metamorphosis is knowing that there's an **optimal moment where it's better to start turning into who you're meant to be**.

Being a larva or a tadpole is actually not my highest expression. I could be a frog! Or a butterfly! ...Or an even more evolved expression of [name everyone in the circle].

Today and in the coming year, may we have the wisdom to know what we no longer need, and the courage to let it go.

May we honor what shaped us, without letting it determine who we become.

And may we make room for the inner butterfly waiting to meet us.

Ken y'hi ratzon, so may it be.

Shana Tovah.