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Tikkun Leil Shavuot - Reflection  
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### A Futile Search for the Wow in Science: Reflections of a Scientist's Daughter

I was 17 years old and my parents told me that they wanted me to take the ACTs. I had already taken the SATs, and I had done just fine, so why another test?

"Just take it," they said.

Not surprisingly, they got their way.

Also not surprisingly, I staged my own I'm-almost-out-of-the-house-and-I-can-do-what-I-please sort of rebellion.

I stayed out late the night before the test, drank a little too much, and walked into the testing room the next day not at my best.

It was okay, I guess, until I got to the science section.

The questions were hard. And I was tired. And they didn't penalize you for guessing.

So I stopped reading and marked "B" all the way down the page.

When I got my scores, my father – the scientist – was not very pleased.

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The truth is that even though I grew up around science, it never appealed to me. I never thought physics experiments were fun. I dreaded memorizing that periodic table in chemistry. I hated dissecting things.

My dad loved it all. He would sometimes leave at night to inject his mice with something or other. He did basic research on the processes by which certain drugs would cause birth defects, mostly cleft palate. Towards the end of his career he started trying to understand how cocaine affected a fetus.

He wholeheartedly embraced the scientific method, that orderly process of asking a question, constructing a hypothesis, doing an experiment, analyzing the data, and on and on. He thrived on the logic of it all. My dad found inspiration in his lab, methodically conducting experiments and discovering the knowledge that lay hidden in the embryo of a mouse.

I don't think I really appreciated his research until I was pregnant. When I was in my 13<sup>th</sup> week and I had an asthma attack, I learned that you get to the front of the line at urgent care. I

learned that it was a good thing that another scientist had figured out that inhaled steroids were safe for a fetus. Suddenly his mouse embryos actually meant something.

But still, I found my inspiration in Judaism. While science and religion are often pitted against one another, I always found them quite similar. The discipline of asking questions and ploughing through religious texts or theological problems is obviously different from the scientific method, but both are predicated on the uncovering of new ideas, of growing beyond what we already know, of searching for new meaning. What's more, my dad and I shared a love for a good debate, of constructing a logical argument and supporting it with something substantive. That too was where science and religion met.

The thing is though, I don't spend most of my days pondering theological questions, and my practice of Judaism is so much more than searching for knowledge. It's being present to suffering when someone is ill, making sure that someone drops off a lasagna after a loved one dies, participating in rituals that bring meaning and order to the chaotic world we live in.

What I find missing in science is the messiness of human relationships. This is what I love about my work, fostering the complex interweaving of relationships that leads to community. Studying Torah together. Singing and davenning together. Working for social justice together. I like how complicated people are, how we are capable of being so generous and open-hearted and we are capable of lying and cheating, how our feelings get hurt and we have to find ways to heal after loss.

My father's logical mind is disappearing as Alzheimers takes its toll. He no longer knows the scientific questions he once grappled with or the discoveries he made long ago. But he taught me to appreciate logic and reason, to try hard even when the work is difficult, and to continue my search for what inspires me in the world.