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As many of you know I spent July in Jerusalem studying Modern Hebrew, nourished by the beauty and sanctity of the Holy City. On the late Thursday afternoon of our last week, Rebecca and I decided to join some friends at the Jerusalem Gay Pride Parade. Now I had never been to a gay pride parade before, but I had seen images of the New York and San Francisco parades on TV ---of the provocative costumes, or lack-thereof. The floats and the gyrating music and the...well you get the picture. So I was quite curious to see what such a parade looked like in Jerusalem. And there was none of that. It was a family affair. Kids and grandmothers, students and soldiers. Everybody was fully dressed.

We first gathered in Gan Ha'Atzmaut, Independence Park, in the center of the city. And after some announcements and logistics, we all began a leisurely stroll down Keren YaYesod, one of Jerusalem's main thoroughfares, closed to cars and buses for the occasion. Black hatted Ultra-Orthodox Jews watched, with some curiosity. Police lined the sidewalks for our protection, although it seemed unnecessary. It was joyful, uneventful and relaxed, just a stroll down the street. It made me proud: Even in a traditional, religious city like Jerusalem, with such a strong Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox presence, there was openness and tolerance.

Then all hell broke loose. Just 20 feet in front of us, a madman pulled out a knife and attacked 6 fellow marchers. It was chaos. At least a dozen police on motorcycles, another half-a-dozen on horseback and several ambulances all suddenly converged in an instant. First we first saw a young woman lying in front of us, in obvious pain and anguish. She was surrounded, quickly taken away, and then all we saw was a pool of blood. Her name was Shira Banki, 16 years old. She herself was not gay, but rather a concerned soul, there to support her friends, just like us. And then the following morning, the news reported a terror attack in the Palestinian West Bank village of Duma. A house was set on fire. 18-month-old Ali Dawabsheh was killed and his parents and 4-year-old brother were critically wounded. The attackers left a message in spray paint. *Long live the Messiah. Price Tag. Revenge.* In less than 12 hours 2 innocent children were gone.

Ali's parents would ultimately succumb to the wounds they suffered that morning, and his 4-year-old brother, now the only surviving member of his family, faces years of painful surgeries and rehabilitation. At Shira's funeral, her parents Uri and Mika

eulogized her with these words: *Shir-Shironet, the intelligent, beautiful, pleasant, curious, musical girl. The girl who managed to even go through puberty with grace, and bloomed like a beautiful flower, when the last year was the height of everything. The height of success at school, of social mobility, of a healthy interest in boys, the height of her relationship with her siblings.*

And I thought of Joan Didion's important, difficult book The Year of Magical Thinking, which begins with a memory, an image of Joan sitting down to dinner with her husband, and watching helplessly as he died, suddenly, without warning, of a heart attack. "Life changes fast," she wrote. "Life changes in an instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends."

This is the great truth Yom Kippur desperately wants us to face. That as philosophers have taught for centuries, life is unknown contingency. Nothing is predictable in this world. Tomorrow might bring normalcy; it might bring joy, it might bring *mazal*, or it might bring something altogether different. Radical contingency, philosophers call it. That every moment we stand before an abyss.

Some among us don't need me to teach them this truth. Just like the rest of us, they had taken for granted a trajectory to life, or maybe just how the day would go. And then, life changed fast. Life changed in an instant. Many among us have faced down challenging and terrifying illnesses, and thank God, we were able to celebrate renewed strength and vigor. For many others among us, I look forward to the moment when we too can share a blessing, a relief-filled laugh, and gratitude to the Holy One for an end to illness and struggle. But for others, our prayers are different. They are about finding the strength and the wisdom to carry on now that life has changed forever.

The Yom Kippur prayer that captures this fearsome reality is the U'netaneh Tokef prayer that we shared earlier, with its litany of horrors—"who by fire and who by water, ...who will reach ripeness of age and who will be taken before their time." It's hard not to flinch as the words "Who shall live and who shall die" are read aloud, because who wants to ask if this can happen to me, or to someone I love. Let's just assume this prayer is talking about someone else. But that would be a mistake, and not because Judaism is morbid, or because Yom Kippur wants to terrify us. But because the first step to living a life of true meaning and blessing, is facing the fact of human powerlessness. Of our fragility. Because facing life's capriciousness and life's unpredictability might inspire us to stop sleeping through life, avoiding facing what's missing, what's broken in our lives, and what we know we need to change, but just haven't gotten around to it.

In her open honest piece “The Father’s Day I Wish For,” psychologist Linda Nielson wrote: “I wish I had realized that loving my father was not the same as knowing him—and that loving him was not the same as allowing him to know me....I wish I had fully embraced my father, rather than simply loving him.” Or Robert Seyffert, grandson of artist Leopold Seyffert, who wrote: “I wish I could speak with my grandparents now,” he said. “I have so much more to say to them now, than when I was young. But I was in a hurry.” Rabbi Eliezar taught his disciples: “Repent one day before your death.” They asked him, “Rabbi, how can we possibly know when we’ll die?” And Rabbi Eliezar replied, “All the more reason you should repent today, because who knows what tomorrow will bring?”

It doesn’t have to be morbid to think this way. It doesn’t have to be uncomfortable, or eerie or scary. It can be empowering, to know that we have today, this day. To choose today to lay aside grievance, and to overcome the discomfort of distance or even guilt. That today can be the day you break the patterns of behavior that distract you from what you know are the true treasures in your lives. To celebrate the treasures. To be grateful for the treasures. To get to know them, really know them, who they are, what gives them joy and laughter, what are their fears, and their dreams. Do you know that, about the people you love? Do you know their fears? Do you know their dreams? Do you take the time to soothe and encourage?

And so we come to services on this Holy Day and hear those terrifying words about the books of life and death because these words are supposed to awaken us to the privilege of love, to the precious gift of family and friendship, and to prioritize them, so there will be no guilt and no regret. And to know that every human life, no matter where you are on your journey, deserves deep, personal and beautiful human connection, and joy. Who by fire, and who by water. Who by earthquake and who by plague. Who will rest and who will wander. Who will be calm and who will be troubled.” Stark, harsh words yes. They shatter the myth that we control our destiny and that we can measure our days. But they also remind us that we should not ignore the gift of this moment. We are here. We have this day.

And so, if, in anger or haste, we spoke hurtful words. If we were selfish, or distracted. If we failed to see and understand the needs, the vulnerabilities, the cries and the subtle pleas of the people we love. We have today. If someone close to us craves our forgiveness, and we are still weighed down by old grievances, we have today. If bad habits and weakness of will have harmed our bodies, our self-images, our relationships and our lives, we have today. We are here. There are people who love us, who count on us, who nourish us. We have today. This is Yom Kippur’s teaching for us.