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Rabbi Zoe Klein notes a tale about a famous Chasidic rabbi. This rabbi was visiting a village somewhere in the Pale of Settlement. He and his entourage were to be the Sabbath guests of the local poor tailor, his wife and their five children. It was quite an honor, and a difficult financial stretch for this family. The family matriarch prepared quite a feast. The first course was kugel and the rabbi, the guest-of-honor, was given the first serving. The rabbi not only ate his serving, but he wolfed down the entire tray before anyone else could take a bite! No one else in this large, poor family got any kugel that Shabbat, and kugel was the staple of their meal. The townspeople were so angry at this rabbi that they ran the glutton out of town. Only years later, after this rabbi, the tailor and his wife had died, did the truth come out. The woman had accidentally used salt and baking soda instead of sugar when preparing that kugel. It tasted disgusting and inedible, so to save the woman from embarrassment, the rabbi ate it all, knowing that he would suffer the false impression that he was an ill-mannered person.

This wonderful story begs the question at the heart of our Yom Kippur spiritual obligations, "What if we're wrong?" What if the judgments, the condemnations and the accusations....what if we're just wrong about them?

I'm sure many of you have been where I've been at some time in your life. We'd borne a grudge and anger toward people and events, and we know exactly what happened. Exactly what we did and what they did. How wrong they were, how guilty they were. We could recount with precise clarity exactly what they said. And then, we learned some new information, our eyes were opened, and we realized that we were wrong about everything.

The *Al Cheyt*, confessional prayer we all said earlier includes, *the sins we have committed b'yodim v'lo yodim, knowingly and unknowingly*. And the real insight of this prayer is that we often hurt the people we love unknowingly, because we misremember, because we judge without knowing all the facts, because sometimes we're oblivious to the pain we cause. Every parent knows this. Every parent, we all do things we think will help our kids, but sometimes end up hurting them. And every person who HAS parent knows this, every spouse, every friend---how the things we say, even with the best intentions, cause them pain. We screw up, we humans, and then, we get wrapped up in

our self-justifications and our certitudes. We all do it, because we are all human, because it's what human beings do.

And so, today, on this Day of Atonement, we face the hardest question of all: What if we're wrong? What haven't I owned up to? What have I done to cause this pain? Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel taught that there is no part of a human being that is perfect. Not a single part. And the great gift, the great blessing of Yom Kippur, is that we believe in the power of forgiveness.

We know how true forgiveness feels, because we've all been forgiven for something. Think back, to a moment when you wronged someone special to you. Remember, now, how it felt when they forgave. But remember how it felt when they did NOT walk away from you. How liberating to hear the words "I forgive you" and to know that they were real. How they softened that pit in your stomach, so you could stop feeling terrible about yourself.

Last month, I read an article written by a gifted spiritual leader. His name is Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger. He's an Israeli orthodox rabbi, and he lives on the West Bank. He and a Palestinian activist named Ali Abu Awwad founded an amazing organization called "Roots" which tries to build bridges of understanding between Palestinians and Israelis who live in neighboring villages. Some of you may remember that we brought Rabbi Schlesinger and Mr. Awwad to our community a couple of years ago. There are such deep seated animosities, indeed outright hatred between Palestinians and Israelis. And mistrust. As scholar Yossi Klein Halevi has written, "What Palestinians hear in their media is a relentless denial of any legitimacy of Jewish history. What Palestinians "know" about the Jews is that we invented our ancient presence in Israel." Palestinians believe that Jews are brutal, military interlopers. The goal must be to expel the Jews from the land.

And what really depresses Rabbi Schlesinger, is the racism and hatred coming from his own people. Like his neighbor, who believes that Jewish law forbids showing any empathy, or building any relationships with Palestinians, "lest we legitimate their claims of belonging to this land." Or the young Orthodox man in his village who calls Palestinians "cockroaches." Rabbi Schlesinger wants Jews and Arabs to look into each other's eyes, and to see the eyes of a fellow human being. To see those same eyes looking back. To become, as he writes, "infused with new intuitions concerning the humanity and equality of the other." To become propelled "to unimagined levels of respect and empathy."

The Hebrew word for "truth" is "Emet," and in Judaism truth is never absolute. Our sages understood that we all have our stories. And how we love, and how we curse, how we shun and how we vent our anger, who we celebrate and who we judge, they all come out of our stories. And our sages understood that our stories are as flawed as the

human mind is flawed. Our memories are not YouTube videos. That's why, when the word "emet," "truth," appears in our sacred texts, it's often coupled with another word to qualify it and temper it. Like when our prayer book speaks of "emet v'emunah" truth and faith. Faith is the opposite of objective truth. Faith is the understanding that there is a limit to what we can know, and so we take a "leap of faith." Faith in God is not proof that God exists. Faith is embracing a reality we cannot see, It means being amazed at all nature's gifts of this life and having faith that God granted them to us.. in ways and for reasons we cannot understand.

Faith in relationships is humility; it's struggling to love people whose thoughts, whose dreams and fears remain tucked away from us and often confound us, flawed, inconsistent, unpredictable, angry and in pain, just like us. But we do it, we love them in their weaknesses, we love them in spite of their flaws, and we thank God they love us, in spite of our flaws. We do it because love and companionship are worth the leap of faith, and forgiveness makes love possible.

In our Bible, the word 'emet', "truth", is also often coupled with the word "chesed," or "kindness". In any relationship, Judaism teaches us to temper judgment with some kindness. That's all. To judge people with some humility, some patience, some empathy, some gentleness.

Think now of the people whose estrangement causes you pain. The loneliness of it. The emptiness of it. Ask yourselves: can you look past all the anger, all the justifications, the reflex to know you are right. Can you see the other person's eyes, can you see that they have feelings, and fragility, just like you?

It won't work for all disputes. Sometimes there actually IS a YouTube video. Sometimes there IS indisputable evidence of cruelty, or worse. The #MeToo movement and the revelations in the Catholic Church have awakened us to the lasting harm of ignoring abuse and we can't let that happen again. But for most other conflicts, we could all use a dose of humility. Remembering that love and laughter are better companions in this life than self-righteousness and being right and alone. It's even good for your body. Letting go of age-old grudges and anger—probably good for your blood pressure and you're your heart.

And so, we pray: May you know a new year of peace, of health, of blessing and of forgiveness. May the heat of anger be banished and washed clean with the warmth of reconciliation and of renewed love. May you look into their eyes, and may they look into your eyes, and may you each know that the Divine Presence rests between you. Amen.