

Apologies and the Afterlife: Can The Dead Grant Forgiveness?
Rabbi Ariel Rackovsky
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As usual, many thanks to my dear friend and colleague Rabbi Ben Skydell, of Congregation Orach Chaim on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, with whom I regularly prepare Shabbos Shuvah and Shabbos Hagadol Derashos. His creativity and sagacious insight into the contemporary Jewish scene are a continuing source of inspiration and entertainment, and I am grateful for our continued collaboration. A special thank you goes out to Emily and Dovid Oratz for getting married on Long Island on August 14, allowing me a rare opportunity earlier that day to prepare with Rabbi Skydell in person.

The marriage of the poet and novelist Thomas Hardy and his wife Emma Gifford could hardly be described as a happy one. They were married in 1874, and moved into a house called Max Gate, which was designed by Hardy and by his brother. After about 15 years of marriage, however, the marriage began to sour. They began spending time apart, and Hardy started taking an interest in other women, including his secretary, Florence Emily Dugdale, an author of children's stories who was 39 years his junior and who, in 1914, became his second wife. From the year 1889, Emma Gifford was a virtual recluse, residing primarily in attic rooms her husband

designed for her ¹, which she described as her “solace and refuge.” Emma Gifford died in 1912 of pleurisy, and though Thomas Hardy married Florence not long afterward, Emma’s death had a traumatic effect on him. In its aftermath, he traveled through Cornwall visiting all the significant sites of their courtship, and attempted to assuage his guilt and calm his obsessive remorse by writing poetry. One of the most poignant and pointed of these is a poem called “An Upbraiding,” in which he imagines, by his wife’s gravesite, the scornful rebuke his dead wife would heap upon him were she able to address him:

*Now I am dead you sing to me
The songs we used to know,
But while I lived you had no wish
Or care for doing so.*

*Now I am dead you come to me
In the moonlight, comfortless;
Ah, what would I have given alive
To win such tenderness!*

When you are dead, and stand to me

¹ Claire Tomalin (2007). *Thomas Hardy*. The Penguin Press.

*Not differenced, as now,
But like again, will you be cold
As when we lived, or how?*

Hardy was tormented by the realization that his devotion to his wife in her death far exceeded his devotion to her in her lifetime, but she was no longer alive so he could make amends.

Solomon Schimmel is a professor of Jewish education and psychology at Boston's Hebrew College, whose life has taken an interesting path which ultimately led him away from his Orthodox upbringing. He attributes his deviation from the path or Torah Judaism to his love of Thomas Hardy. In his book *Wounds not healed by time : the Power of repentance and forgiveness*, he frames Thomas Hardy's guilt-racked remonstrations as a moral, psychological and philosophical issue:

All too often the person whom you hurt is no longer accessible to you, perhaps even no longer alive. How can you apologize to and alleviate the pain you caused to a member of your family who has gone to the grave bearing the wounds you inflicted? A major concern of religious moralists was how to deal

with guilt and repentance when apology and reparation were no longer objectively possible...²

Is death the final frontier in interpersonal relationships, and are unresolved issues doomed to remain so after death? Does the Jewish tradition allow for apologies in the afterlife?

The Source

The Talmud in Masechet Yoma describes the importance of forgiveness as a prerequisite for the atonement of Yom Kippur. For sins between man and God, Yom Kippur effectuates forgiveness. However, Yom Kippur does not effectuate atonement for interpersonal sins as long as the aggrieved party has not forgiven. This may be the best known, though not the most meticulously observed, law of Yom Kippur.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת יומא דף פה עמוד ב

משנה. חטאת ואשם ודאי - מכפרין. מיתה ויום הכפורים - מכפרין עם התשובה.

עבירות שבין אדם למקום - יום הכפורים מכפר, עבירות שבין אדם לחבירו - אין יום הכפורים מכפר, עד שירצה את חבירו. דרש רבי אלעזר בן עזריה: מכל חטאתיכם לפני ה' תטהרו עבירות שבין אדם למקום - יום הכפורים מכפר, עבירות שבין אדם לחבירו - אין יום הכפורים מכפר, עד שירצה את חבירו.

The sin-offering and the guilt-offering [for the] undoubted commission of certain offences procure atonement, death and the day of atonement procure atonement together with penitence.

² Solomon Schimmel-Wounds not healed by time : the power of repentance and forgiveness pgs. 155-157

For transgressions as between man and the omnipresent the day of atonement procures atonement, but for transgressions as between man and his fellow the day of atonement does not procure any atonement, until he has pacified his fellow. This was expounded by r. Eleazar b. Azariah: from all your sins before the lord shall ye be clean, i.e., For transgressions as between man and the omnipresent the day of atonement procures atonement, but for transgressions as between man and his fellow the day of atonement does not procure atonement until he has pacified his fellow.

Forgiveness from the aggrieved party is such a necessary component in *teshuva* that the Talmud, in elaborating on this Mishnah, requires a person to return up to three times in an attempt to gain forgiveness of a person he or she has wronged. Indeed, Rav Chisda requires that nine people be present (plus the offender) each time forgiveness is requested, though there is no need to return more than three times. And the request for forgiveness, per the Mishnah in Bava Kamma, must be verbal:

משנה מסכת בבא קמא פרק ה

משנה ז: אף על פי שהוא נותן לו אין נמחל לו עד שיבקש ממנו שנאמר (בראשית כ') ועתה השב אשת וגומר ומנין שלא יהא המוחל אכזרי שנאמר (שם/בראשית כ') ויתפלל אברהם אל האלהים וירפא אלהים את אבימלך וגומר

Mishnah. *Even though the offender pays him [compensation], the offence is not forgiven until he asks him for pardon, as it says: now therefore restore the man's wife etc. Whence can we learn that should the injured person not forgive him he would be*

[stigmatised as] cruel? From the words: so abraham prayed unto god and god healed abimelech etc.

עבירות שבין אדם למקום וכו'. רמי ליה רב יוסף בר חבו לרבי אבהו: עבירות שבין אדם לחבירו אין יום הכפורים מכפר? והא כתיב אם יחטא איש לאיש ופללו אלהים! - מאן אלהים - דיינא. - אי הכי אימא סיפא: ואם לה' יחטא איש מי יתפלל לו? - הכי קאמר: אם יחטא איש לאיש ופללו - אלהים ימחול לו, ואם לה' יחטא איש - מי יתפלל בעדו, תשובה ומעשים טובים. אמר רבי יצחק: כל המקניט את חבירו, אפילו בדברים - צריך לפייסו, שנאמר בני אם ערבת לרעך תקעת לזר כפוך נוקשת באמרי פיך... עשה זאת אפוא בני והנצל כי באת בכף רעך לך התרפס ורהב רעך. אם ממון יש בידך - התר לו פסת יד, ואם לאו - הרבה עליו ריעים. (ואמר) +מסורת הש"ס: [אמר] רב חסדא: וצריך לפייסו בשלש שורות של שלשה בני אדם, שנאמר ישר על אנשים ויאמר חטאתי וישר העויתי ולא שוה לי. (ואמר) +מסורת הש"ס: [אמר] רבי יוסי בר חנינא: כל המבקש מטו מחבירו אל יבקש ממנו יותר משלש פעמים, שנאמר אנא שא נא... ועתה שא נא

In his reading of the passage in Yoma, the philosopher Moshe Halbertal of Hebrew University explains:

"The Talmud develops this requirement for human forgiveness into a full-fledged legal institution. First, the request for forgiveness must be public: "R. Chisda said that he must placate his fellow before three lines of three people." This is, again, tied to the creative reading of a biblical verse, but the clear intent is to make the request for forgiveness a social fact. A single, casual encounter involving only the injurer and the injured will not suffice. The next talmudic statement ensures that, on the other hand, the injurer does not become a permanent hostage to the injured party: "R. Yosi bar Chanina said, 'whoever seeks forgiveness from his friend should not seek it more than three times.'"

All this is wonderful, but there is one major prerequisite for it to work: both parties must be alive. But what if the wronged party is dead? The Talmud continues:

ואם מת - מביא עשרה בני אדם, ומעמידן על קברו, ואומר: חטאתי לה' אלהי ישראל ולפלוני שחבלתי בו.

The Yerushalmi

Contrast these passages in the Talmud Bavli with the next source, taken from the Jerusalem Talmud:

תלמוד ירושלמי (וילנא) מסכת יומא פרק ח הלכה ז

שמואל אמר ההן דחטא על חבריה צריך מימר ליה סרחית עלך ואין קבלי' הא טבאות ואין לא מייתי בני נש ומפיס ליה קומיהון הדא היא דכתי' [איוב לג כז] ישר על אנשים יעשה שורה של אנשים ויאמר חטאתי וישר העויתי ולא שוה לי אם עשה כן עליו הכתוב אומר [שם כח] פדה נפשו מעבר בשחת וחיתו באור תראה מית צריך מפייסיה על קיברתיה ומימר סרחית עלך

Shmuel said: One who sinned toward his fellow should ask the victim for forgiveness and say the following to him: "I have sinned toward you. Please forgive me." If [the fellow] accepts this and says that he forgives him that is good. But if not, the sinner should gather a delegation and placate the offended party...If the one toward whom he sinned died, he [the sinner] must placate him [the offended party] at his gravesite and say "I have sinned toward you."

Note several differences between the Bavli and the Yerushalmi. First, the Yerushalmi does not require a minyan at the gravesite. Second, the

Yerushalmi does not require invoking God's name during the apology; there is no need to state that "I have sinned to the God of Israel and to so-and-so." Finally, in the Yerushalmi's version, the deceased is addressed directly- "I have sinned toward *you*," whereas the Bavli requires the deceased to be addressed in the third person.

It seems clear, both from the Yerushalmi and the Bavli, that when a person who is wronged passes away, some kind of forgiveness ritual must be observed. What is less clear is what the purpose might be of that ritual, and how the ritual achieves any of those objectives. Is it to achieve expiation by the deceased, or a cathartic tableau designed to demonstrate general remorse and contrition on the part of the sinner? Is it to redress a wrong committed before the sinner passed, or to calm the sinner's guilt over that wrong? And if it is, indeed, to attain forgiveness, how is such a thing possible if the wronged party is not alive to grant it?

It may not surprise you that the commentaries are divided on this issue, into roughly two schools of thought. This first is that this ritual is designed to right a wrong, and that forgiveness is something that can be granted even by the deceased.

The Rambam

As is his wont, the Rambam quotes the Bavli and not the Yerushalmi.

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ב הלכה יא

החוטא לחבירו ומת חבירו קודם שיבקש מחילה מביא עשרה בני אדם ומעמידן על קברו ויאמר בפניהם חטאתי לה' אלהי ישראל ולפלוני זה שכך וכך עשיתי לו, ואם היה חייב לו ממון יחזירו ליורשים, לא היה יודע לו יורשין יניחנו בבית דין ויתודה.

If a person wronged a colleague and the latter died before he could ask him for forgiveness, he should take ten people and say the following while they are standing before the colleague's grave: "I sinned against God, the Lord of Israel, and against this person by doing the following to him...." If he owed him money, he should return it to his heirs. If he is unaware of the identity of his heirs, he should place [the sum] in [the hands of] the court and confess

For the Rambam, it seems that this ritual is designed to redress grievances and achieve forgiveness. Reading the Rambam in its entirety supports this assertion, because he goes on to speak of settling outstanding financial obligations with the heirs. Making right a financial wrong, for the Rambam, is equivalent to making right an emotional one.

Rav Saadia Gaon, in his masterwork *Emunot VeDeiot*, takes this one step further. For him, visiting the grave of a person to ask forgiveness is so clearly about redressing a wrong that it assumes the same form as asking a living person for forgiveness: with a minyan (as the Rambam also requires), and asking as many as three times.

Rav Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, the second Gerrer Rebbe, adopts a slightly different approach in his commentary *Sfas Emes* on the Talmud. Once a person dies, he or she lives in a world of truth, free of the earthly bonds of drama and jealousy and entirely above petty worldly concerns; for such a person, who sees the truth, forgiveness is certainly granted with no hesitation.

In the conception of the Rambam, Rav Saadia Gaon, and the Sfas Emes, this ritual is about the dead: a wrong must always be redressed, even after the death of the wronged party. That is the purpose of posthumous graveside visits- to redress wrongs through contrition, coercion or clarity on the part of the deceased.

The simple problem, of course, is that the deceased is just that: dead. If forgiveness is a dialogue that requires both parties- the sinner and the victim- how can there be forgiveness when the victim is dead? What is the point of this elaborate forgiveness ritual- one *everyone* requires- when there is no apparent way to attain actual forgiveness?

This is what bothered a number of other commentaries, either implicitly or explicitly, leading them to suggest an alternative explanation. The dead are

not entitled to redress, because they are no longer alive. So what is the purpose of this ritual? Simple: *asking forgiveness by someone's grave is not to set things right with the dead- it's to set things right with the living.*

Rav Yechiel Michel Epstein of Novhardok, in his work *Aruch Hashulchan*, offers a hybrid approach, suggesting two reasons for visiting the grave of a wronged person. First, the presence of a minyan guarantees the presence of the *shechinah*; out of respect to the *shechinah*, the deceased will surely forgive the penitent. Ultimately, though, he is unsatisfied with this explanation. After all, mitzvos were given, the Torah tells us, *today* to perform them- by the living. How can one attain forgiveness from a person who is not alive to grant it? For this reason, the *Aruch Hashulchan* offers a second explanation. The purpose of going to a grave is not about securing forgiveness from dead, which can't really be granted. It is precisely *because* forgiveness can never be granted that visiting the grave is essential. Demonstrating heartfelt remorse will at least prevent further divine punishment for this transgression, which would happen otherwise because the human victim can never forgive it.

Also of this school of thought is Rav Moshe Mitrani, in his commentary *Kiryat Sefer* on the Rambam. He explains that the purpose of visiting a grave of a person we have wronged is to cultivate the attribute of humility. This

ritual so closely mimics the process of asking forgiveness from a living person because cultivating humility is precisely the purpose of begging forgiveness from a living person. Acknowledging that we have done something offensive and wrong is humbling; coming with our hat in our hands and begging forgiveness from another person cuts us down, puts us in our place. Doing this for a person who has passed should have the same effect.

קרית ספר הלכות תשובה פרק ב

החוטא לחבירו ומת חבירו קודם שישאל ממנו מחילה מביא עשרה בני אדם ומעמידם על קברו ויאמר לפניהם חטאתי לאלהי ישראל ולפלוגי זה שחטאתי לו בכך כדי שיכנע לבו ויהא הליכתו לקברו חלף ביתו בחייו

Rabbi Moses ben Joseph Trani, Kiryat Sefer-

A person who sins against another who then dies before being asked forgiveness should bring a quorum to his grave and say, in their presence, "I have sinned to the God of Israel and to this person, against whom I have sinned in this way," in order that his heart be humbled, and that visiting his grave will be a substitute for visiting his home while he was alive

Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher, in his Halachic work called the Arbaah Turim, offers another explanation in this vein, but less from the perspective of the penitent. As we enter the High Holidays, we want God to judge us favorably as a people, but if our interpersonal dealings are less than stellar and if we have unresolved issues and tensions among us, we will not be able to secure a favorable verdict. Visiting the graves of those we have wronged is not

about righting wrongs with the dead; it's not even about self improvement. It is a matter national spiritual self preservation. Communal forgiveness can only be attained from God when steps are taken by its members demonstrate their resolve to end disputes and remove any shred of strife from among themselves. We cannot enter Yom Kippur as a community when we have unresolved issues, and our graveside visitations show our commitment, rendering us impervious from the prosecutorial ministrations of the Satan on the day of our judgement and forgiveness.

So we have two schools of thought. The first is that if you have been wronged, you are entitled to redress, no matter what- whether you are alive or dead. This is the view of the Rambam, Rav Saadia Gaon, the Yam Shel Shlomo and the Sfas Emes. The second is the one adopted by the Kiryat Sefer, the Aruch Hashulchan and the Tur. Once someone is dead, they can no longer forgive and there is no way to make things right with them. With the passing of the victim, the perpetrator still needs to show his or her own remorse and own up to their sins- for the sake of their characters, their heavenly balance sheet or the future of their people.

This communal approach is echoed in the writing of Solomon Schimmel. Standing by the graveside certainly has salutary psychological and philosophical benefits, as it is cathartic for the penitent. However, a

graveside public confession also functions as a way of publicly affirming fealty to communal norms, placing the penitent in the context of his or her community.

Schimmel ibid

*A public confession, when the victim is dead, serves several practical and spiritual purposes. Confession serves a cathartic, therapeutic function. The public confession is made in lieu of the private one that should have been made directly to the victim. The public confession is a way of letting the community know that you are truly remorseful and would have apologized and asked forgiveness from your victim if only he were still alive. **Moreover, since many offenses against others are breaches of communal norms, the public confession is a declaration of acceptance of the community's norms. Once the sinner has announced his sin before ten men, he will not deny it later when his feelings or circumstances might change. Having become part of the public record, it cannot be easily recanted.***

Application

I've been thinking of this ritual off and on for years, ever since I actually saw it happen. It was a quiet and stifling summer evening at the Britton Road Cemetery, in Rochester, New York. A group of us was there standing at a respectful distance from a certain nondescript grave, and a woman we

didn't know was standing next to it, sobbing silently. We had been summoned hastily in a flurry of phone calls to *shlep* out to the cemetery to make a minyan for this woman, who had come in especially from out of town with one objective, and one objective only: To ask forgiveness from her deceased mother, exactly in the manner described in this passage. I was not privy to the insult for which this woman was asking forgiveness, and was never made aware of the hurtful words, misguided actions or toxic behavior patterns that necessitated this pilgrimage. In the stillness of a Rochester cemetery on a hot summer afternoon, it was just us and the silent inhabitants of the cemetery. While at the time, I didn't think this was particularly out of the ordinary, I've reflected on this incident many times since, especially as I've been honored to officiate at numerous funerals and burials and, more recently, as I joined the Chevrah Kadisha of Dallas as an adjunct member. At funerals and *taharachs* as well, we ask forgiveness from the dead for the manner in which we care for them- or didn't... In reflecting on this practice, a simple question keeps coming back. What is the lesson in it for us? I believe there are several.

The first lesson is that we think our active relationship with others only lasts in their lifetime. What the ritual of posthumous forgiveness tells us, however, is something profound and counterintuitive: certainly according to those who view this visit as a means of attaining forgiveness, our

responsibility toward others and our reckoning with them does not end with their passing, and assuming that it does is an easy, and incorrect, ethical out. As William Faulkner wrote it in *Requiem for a Nun*, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” In a very real sense, there is an ongoing dialogue between the living and the dead, so ends left loose at the time of death need to be redressed afterward.

There is another important lesson here. You will often hear mitzvos divided into the neat categories of *Bein Adam leMakom* and *Bein Adam LeChaveiro*, a dichotomy in which a mitzvah either governs one’s relationship with God or with other people. These categories are especially when castigating other Jews and painting them as hypocrites, and as excuses for our own lack of ritual observance. How many times have we heard people rail against Jews who are supposedly meticulous in the performance of *mitzvos* that relate to God but weak in the performance of interpersonal commandments? *Menschlichkeit* is next to Godliness, isn’t it!? The truth is that some of the most trenchant criticism of this behavior has originated from within: The great *mashgiach* of the Beer Yaakov Yeshiva, Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, writes in his masterful work *Alei Shur* that the very definition of false frumkeit is a person who puts on his Tallis with great enthusiasm and allows whips the person sitting behind him with his enthusiastic fringes. It goes the other way, as well. Have you ever heard people ridicule those who think

that ritual commandments are just not important, and that social justice and *tikkun olam* are the most important concepts in Judaism? The late Joan Rivers was an exemplar of this attitude when she said, “God doesn't care that I have a sandwich on Yom Kippur. He cares that I helped a blind man across the street.” Here, too, some serious criticism has come from within. Just last year, Rabbi Aaron Starr of Congregation Shaaray Zedek, a major Conservative synagogue in Southfield, Michigan, aroused a good deal of discussion with his Rosh Hashanah sermon, “It’s Time to say Kaddish for Tikkun Olam.” Here is the money quote:

As such, Tikkun Olam has devolved today to mean anything that fits into the categories of community service or helping the underdog. The focus on universalism has led to stripping the word “mitzvah” of any sense of divine obligation, and instead understands “mitzvot” to mean, simply, “good deeds.”

Yes, everyone thinks these two categories- *bein adam lemakom* and *bein adam lechaveiro*- are neat boxes in which to put *mitzvos*, but ultimately, this is a cheap and self serving dichotomy. In the graveside repentance ritual, we see that the boundaries have been heavily blurred, if not entirely eradicated. At the graveside, we see a personal apology assuming the form of a *davar shebikedushah*, a prayer for which a minyan is required. Furthermore, we see the apology and confession of an interpersonal sin take place with the name of God invoked first- *bein adam lechaveiro* wears *bein adam lemakom* clothing. If the blurring of the boundaries in this ritual teaches us anything, it is that

we must bring the same sense of discipline and seriousness to both areas of spiritual endeavor, and that whichever one speaks less to us- whichever one we are not as good at- is the one we must work hardest to perform.

But there is one more lesson. There is no question that visiting the grave of a wronged person is an absolute necessity, no matter what school of thought you follow. If you believe that the rights of the aggrieved continue after their passing, it makes perfect sense that you must go there and engage in a public ritual seeking forgiveness. After all, the dead can grant forgiveness, and you can't be part of the community of the living if you haven't taken care of the dead. If you believe the dead can speak from beyond the grave and grant us forgiveness, is it not better to attain it in person and through dialogue than grasping at straws of forgiveness, conjecturing how we can gain it from people who can't speak for themselves any longer?

There will always be those of us who read about asking forgiveness of the dead and react with skepticism. As the Talmud tells us, *today* is when we need to act. If that is the case- if visiting a grave is just about staving off further punishment or learning humility- we need to ask ourselves a critical and urgent question. What does that teach us about the way we live our life and relate to the *living*? How many of us are Thomas Hardy, not dealing with an interpersonal problem when there is time to rectify it, and then, when time runs out, being left with no recourse other than remorse?

*Now I am dead you come to me
In the moonlight, comfortless;
Ah, what would I have given alive
To win such tenderness!*

If wrongs can never be righted after the passing of the victim, the question is: what are we doing this week? Who are the people to whom we are callous or indifferent, with whom we have gotten angry, been dishonest or given bad advice? Hillel Fuld is one of today's most dynamic tech entrepreneurs in Israel, one of the driving forces promoting Israel as a source of technological genius and dynamic innovation. He covers the Israeli beat for many different publications and advises dozens of companies about the Israeli market; if you want to know what's happening in Israel technologically speaking, Hillel is the one to talk to. He is also outspoken and opinionated on other matters relating to Israel, especially politics- and is not shy about expressing them through his prolific and regular social media engagement. At the end of 2016, you may recall, the UN passed a resolution calling the Western Wall and half of Jerusalem illegal, over which the US abstained. Hillel was devastated, and he wrote a scathing post about it. What he actually wrote is less relevant to the story and would merely

serve to distract from the remarkable turn of events that happened next. I will let Hillel tell the story³:

That post went moderately viral with hundreds of shares and comments and close to 1000 reactions. But I made a mistake. I got too emotional about the subject.

Among the many comments telling me I was spot-on were some very strong voices telling me I am dead wrong... I disagreed, to say the least. But again, I made a mistake.

One of the many voices disagreeing with me was a man named Michael Zeff. We debated and it got heated- too heated. I threw out accusations and phrases I should not have. In fact, it got so bad that Michael went back and deleted his comments because of how ugly the thread got.

The next day... I was at work, writing a new press release and I wanted to give the story to the local press, so I reached out to an editor friend and asked him to introduce me to one of his tech reporters.

A few minutes later I was on the phone with a journalist named Michael Zeff. Yes, that Michael Zeff. Only, I had zero recollection of our encounter the day before. I mean, I remembered the ugly thread, but didn't remember his name and so the call began like every journalist pitch call. I did my thing, he liked it

³ <http://jewishvaluescenter.org/jvoblog/power>

and as we were about to hang up, Michael did something I then thought was super strange but am beyond happy about now.

He quietly and with clear hesitation started with "I don't usually mix business and pleasure, but I kinda have to say something..." I was confused and curious.

"Yes?"

"Do you know that you called me a self-hating Jew yesterday on Facebook?"

My heart dropped and not only because I was afraid he would hold a grudge and not cover the story I had just pitched, but mainly because it is one thing to call names on Facebook from behind a screen and a keyboard, and a whole other- quite awkward I might add- encounter when hearing the voice of the person, the real person, you so quickly dismissed just 24 hours before.

The marketing team was sitting there in the room and surely saw my face turn white. I of course immediately apologized and explained how I know I get very emotional when it comes to Israel and I did not mean what I said. He apologized for his words and the call ended as if that horrible thread never happened. He wrote a positive story that was published the very next day.

...I couldn't shake the feeling that this happened for a reason. I mean, what are the chances? I attack someone publicly and the very next day, I need something from them and am "forced" to apologize and repair my damage. There had to be a reason that happened that way.

This morning, as I was beginning my day, I get an email from a colleague who was in the room the whole time while that horribly awkward conversation was going on. "Did you hear about this?"

Michael Zeff had died of a sudden heart attack in his Jerusalem apartment (ed. At the age of 32).

"Na, can't be our guy" I thought. But it was our guy, and Michael is gone.

I am speechless. A tragedy. A good man lost. But I cannot believe that I had the rare opportunity to right my wrong with Michael just days before his horrible death. I am thankful that I did and I am beyond shocked how this whole story went down.

There is no telling how much time any of us have left; will we leave forgiveness to chance?