

Judy Weisman
High Holidays 2017

Yom Kippur 2017

It was 1997. I was a fairly newly single mother of two sons, one of whom was studying for his Bar Mitzvah. The rabbi we had at the time was someone I did not particularly like, as I felt she did not demand enough of my son, who was bright and capable but lazy, as most 13 year olds are; I expected a certain level of competence and involvement from him in his Bar Mitzvah preparation, and she was much more lenient. In general, her style did not agree with mine. However, we went to services every week and were very involved with our small but active northern NY Jewish community.

In addition to my separation from my husband, I had not spoken with my father for about two years: he did not approve of what he called the overly permissive way my husband and I were raising our boys. That actually stemmed from an incident when the soon-to-be Bar Mitzvah boy was four years old and wouldn't go to bed when told to by his grandfather. My father had been visiting for 10 days and offered to babysit one evening when the live-in nanny [whom we employed due to our demanding work schedules] was out. When the nanny arrived home, ahead of us, she looked at my son, who was running around like a wild man, said "Gabe. Go to bed now." and he promptly did. This really frosted my father. After a few years of polite and superficial conversation, my father decided to absent himself from our lives.

Fast forward to Yom Kippur 1997. The rabbi had to come up with multiple sermons as well as daven multiple services and by Yom Kippur she was tired. We were tired. Everybody wanted sundown to come. Everybody was hungry. Everybody had a headache. Somehow, I actually paid attention to this particular sermon, which was about forgiveness (no surprise on Yom Kippur). I don't recall her exact words, but her kindness came through and I knew she was not just mouthing a party line. Something she said about giving one more chance clicked.

I went home during the break and called my father. I left a voicemail and lo and behold, he called back about two weeks later. He had not known I was separated and I had not known he had developed cancer. We reconciled and he lived for another 2 ½ years. All thanks to a rabbi I did not particularly like. You never know where inspiration might come from. So thank you, Reena.