

Shabbat 7/11/18

Two years. How did we arrive here? How have our feet kept moving? How have our mouths kept talking? Our hearts kept loving? Our souls kept finding light? Two years. Without hearing Gidi call “Aba...I want water” at 3 am. Without seeing Gidi round the corner of the hallway in his signature glittery rainbow toulle dress, click clacking in the too small princess shoes that his brothers called “torture devices”. Without laughing at his creativity each morning as he dressed himself, with colorful socks pulled up to his knees, fedora perched on his head, nails painted sparkly purple.

Sometimes when I’m at Ikar I can still feel him next to me, playing with my rings or tugging on my skirt, wanting to sit next to me or on me. I can still feel the weight of him on my left hip as we listened up close to the shofar on Yom Kippur in Ikar’s old Westside JCC space. Sometimes during services I look down expecting to see him next to me, and it hits me...I had him. This Gidi of mine. He was right here. And now he’s not.

So many of you either knew Gidi or have gotten to know him through his death. I don’t need to tell most of you that he was magical. That he had a way of making everyone feel happy, of ensuring everyone felt seen, of turning every stranger into a friend. Gidi would choose clothing because he knew it would make a classmate smile to see him wear that particular shirt that day. Gidi would talk to strangers in every line, getting to know their names and where they were from and commenting on whatever item of clothing or jewelry they were wearing that he thought looked fabulous. Gidi would come at you, running, arms outstretched, no cares in the world, all in. Gidi would greet me in the mornings or after school with “I love you!” instead of “hello”. Gidi was incredible.

Gidi’s death was an accident. A terrible, horrible split second. It shouldn’t have happened- to this day no one understands how it happened. When we think about that day, and we think about it daily, we are still left feeling shocked, surprised, confused, angry. But most of all, I think we are left feeling cheated. Cheated of this child who made a hard day better just by giving a tight hug. Cheated of this child who was unabashedly himself, all the time, everywhere. Cheated of this child who made all of us realize it made no difference what you wore, or what you played with, or who your friends were...the only thing that

mattered was how much love you put into a room. Gidi always put love into a room. Gidi was love.

I hate that when I talk about Gidi, I now have to do it in the context of grief. I want to be able to just talk about him freely- share memories and stories- without them being laden with sadness or guilt or longing. I want to simply just be able to tell you what it was like to fall asleep with him next to me on the couch, tell you the kinds of funny faces he would make with Amit for the camera, tell you about how he would shout across the entire campus at school if he saw Zeve or Oren walking past a classroom, just so that he could say hi to his brothers, sticking his little hands and face through the fence at the TK yard to chat. I want to be able to tell you about how he would sit to let his freshly painted toenails dry on the floor of my bathroom with the patience of a meditating monk. About how when he would swim, he would rather bounce himself up and down to get across the pool than to do any sort of stroke, even though he knew how to swim perfectly. I want to tell you about how he bedazzled all of his stuffed animals' ears, about how he would play a game with Zeve and Oren called Bible, wherein he was an imprisoned goat and Oren his captor. I want to tell you about his love of salt on everything, how he would always call Chummus "Huhmmus" and Challah "Haaaallah", just to make Amit mad. How he would let Zeve walk past him to get in and out of the car with a smile on his face, but then always block the exit with his legs when Oren would try to leave. I want to tell you about his love of glitter, of My Little Pony, and of anything "fancy". I want to tell you about how he would push his silver glittery goggles onto his face with such force that his eyes would stay red and puffy for hours after he went swimming. I want to tell you that his favorite place to go was the Tea Cottage near our house, and how the librarian at our local library knew that his favorite genre of book was anything related to princesses or ballet. I want to tell you that his breath really stank in the morning, that his feet really stank at night, and that he loved when Amit would point the shower stream straight into his face. I want to tell you that he loved the Lego Friends, and balloons, and would always lick the frosting off of a cupcake and then leave the cake part untouched. I want to tell you that he would eat melted cheese at any time and on anything, and I want to tell you that he was never scared of any animal or any person. I want to tell you that he loved twinkly lights, and always chose the glitteriest, sparkliest shoes off the rack. I want to tell you

how he would come home from school with a new hair clip that he found in the yard daily, and that he loved plums and pears. I want to tell you about how excited he was to get to wear black leggings to ballet class, and about how we would fight on days he wanted to wear tights...not about the tights themselves, but about the fact that he never wanted to wear anything OVER the tights. I want to tell you how happy he always was after a haircut that he could see his eyebrows again, and I want to tell you about the school Mother's Day celebration when he got to wear lipgloss because "mama, you said lipgloss is only for special occasions and today is Mother's Day". I want to tell you how well he could draw, and write and read for just turning 5 years old. I want to tell about you his propensity for fashion and design and styling. I want to tell you how talented he was on so many levels...dancing, singing, standing in front of a crowd. I want to shout from the rooftops every little detail I can about this boy who was so spectacular.

But all of these details of Gidi's life are now, unfortunately, tied up in the context of grief. Of missing. Of remembering. Of sharing. Of shouting from the rooftops. Sometimes I really do feel like I'm shouting from the rooftops. Telling people things they don't want to know, don't need to know perhaps. But if I can't shout from the rooftops, how will Gidi have his story told? What is my job, Amit's job, if not to make sure his story is told?

Again this year, we are inviting all of you to join us in telling Gidi's story through Gidi's Kindness Project. Last year hundreds of people- some our closest friends and family, some perfect strangers- engaged in acts of random kindness in the days spanning Gidi's yartzeit until his birthday on September 7th. Together we were able to bring smiles, surprise, and joy to friends and strangers alike all over the world. From LA to Israel to London, people joined us in Gidi's Kindness Project, and we are so excited to invite you all to join us again. From sunset tonight until September 7th, do an act of kindness, leave behind a kindness card, and if you're so inclined, post about your act and your experience on our Gidi's Kindness Project facebook or Instagram page. You can help us bring Gidi's legacy of joy and kindness and love to the world. There is more info at gidimagic.com, and we have kindness cards here today for you to take.

We are so grateful for our village. We are so lonely in this grief. Yet in our loneliness, you haven't left us alone. Most of us in the room have likely been following the news story about Tahlequah, a mother orca whale from the J Pod off the coast of Washington, who has been grieving the death of her calf. For over 17 days now, Tahlequah has not let go of her dead baby. Discussions about Tahlequah are everywhere in the mainstream media as well as in the special parent grief groups that I follow on social media and blogs. In the mainstream media there is a lot of discussion about this "unprecedented behavior" that we are witnessing in this mother whale. People are shocked, awed, overwhelmed, in tears at witnessing the grief and the love they are seeing coming from this grieving mama orca. As the days have gone on, discussion has moved on to concern over Tahlequah's well-being—the fact that she hasn't foraged for food or potentially eaten in two weeks, the fact that she hasn't given herself ample time to recover from childbirth. Marine scientists are concerned that she won't survive this.

While the mainstream media is fascinated by Tahlequah, and while the general public has shared their inability to look away at what seems to them the most dramatic display of grief they've ever witnessed in an animal, there has been a different reaction in the parental grief world of which Amit and I are now a part. In our grief world, there has been no shock or overwhelming fascination at seeing this mother behave this way. In the fact, the opposite is true. The reaction in our grief world has simply been: Yes, Tahlequah. We know.

I don't think there is any parent of a dead child who doesn't understand what Tahlequah is going through. I don't think there is any parent of a dead child who doesn't know what it feels like to simply NOT CARE if they aren't taking care of themselves, to NOT CARE if they don't survive this, to NOT CARE who is looking or talking as they grieve. I don't think there is any parent of a dead child who can't connect with Tahlequah trying with all her mama might to will that calf back into life, to make that baby swim again, to keep that sweet baby whale as part of her living family. Yes, Tahlequah. We know.

Today though I don't want to talk too much about Tahlequah. I want to talk about her pod, her village, her people. Because while I empathize with Tahlequah, it is her pod where I am finding the most inspiration. They have been right by her

side. They have circled her, protected her. They have taken turn keeping her dead baby afloat in the water while she rests, continuing to hold the baby's body up while she has a few moments to regain her strength. They have literally not left her side as she has swum over 1000 miles over 17 days with her baby's body on her back. Tahlequah has lost a child, yes. But Tahlequah is surrounded by an incredible village. They are not only keeping her baby afloat, they are keeping her afloat as well. They have allowed her to do what she's needed to do with grace. Even as Tahlequah is traumatized, she is blessed. And our family can connect with this piece of the story too.

Like Tahlequah, we are resisting, as best as we can, letting our baby fall into the abyss. We are trying to hold him up, trying to make the world pay attention. We are still grieving, even as our culture says we should be moving on. And we know that grief is love. And our love for Gidi is endless. So we will grieve forever. We are tired at times. Exhausted. Sometimes we feel like he's slipping away, or we aren't strong enough to keep going. And you have all helped us hold Gidi up. You have spoken his name, and shared your memories of him. You have looked at pictures with us, listened to our stories. You have helped us allow Gidi to be larger than life, even in death. You have been helping to keep all five of us afloat.

I read a few days ago on a website I follow called Refuge in Grief that "It is a radical act to let things hurt". Our society isn't accustomed to sitting with pain. I think that is why Tahlequah's story has resonated so deeply with all of us. We are witnessing a sentient being letting things hurt. And we are witnessing her community hurt with her, grieve with her, and support her in the only way they know how. What a lucky mama to have to feel such pain, and yet to know she isn't alone in her agony. Just like Tahlequah- we have felt very lonely on this journey. But we haven't been alone.

Thank you for keeping us afloat for two years. I wish you hadn't had to. I wish our sweet sparkly Gidi was right next to us, wearing something fabulous, speaking for himself. I wish we didn't have to tell his story. But we will. And we will be overcome by sadness and loneliness and exhaustion...it doesn't end for us grieving parents as the pages of the calendar turn.

It is a radical act to let things hurt. Gidi would love the word “radical”. So we’re gonna go for it, and let it hurt as much as we need to. Grief is love, and our love for Gidi is for all time.

Shabbat shalom.