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In New York, a few years ago, I was lucky to catch a one-woman off-Broadway show, "Blown Sideways Through Life." The talented and very funny author, star, Claudia Sher, speaks of her employment history of seventy jobs in 19 years. She builds her title from this passage by H.G. Wells: "Most people seem to live 'in character'; they have a place; they know what is becoming in them and what is due to them. But there is also another kind of life...one that gets hit by some unusual (transverse) force, one is jerked out of one's stratum and one lives crosswise for the rest of the time." Claudia Sher comments, developing her show's title: "That's me – blown sideways through life."

So many events challenge our sense of order, our view of how the world should be – the car accident that severely injures a young parent, the collapse of a Korean department store on hundreds of customers, the tremendous earthquake in Kobe, Japan, the bombing in Oklahoma City, ... the power of these disasters lies beyond our total comprehension. At some level perhaps we are all victims blown sideways through life...by illness...jerked out of our stratum by some unusual (transverse) force of tragedy, or live crosswise because of some personal disaster. We could easily live crosswise for the rest of our lives, unconnected, isolated. We could allow the earthquakes of life to rip us apart, our personal explosions to embitter us. Still quaking from the shock, we could become cynical, hard, doubting...

Every major disaster seems to be followed by the inevitable story on faith. One such piece in L.A. Times after the Oklahoma City bombing was titled: "Oklahoma City Blast Leaves Residents With Questions About Faith." Earthquake in Japan, hurricane in St. Thomas, doubt may be understandable, even expected.

I want to suggest to you that there are other responses, responses that lead to healing; what could blow one's life apart more than the death of a child? A tornado killed the four-year-old daughter of two ministers. Remember the incredible dignity and faith and courage that a year later had that mother and minister rededicating her church on the same spot where her daughter had died...she maintained her faith, her connection to her community; for this mother, God was still there. Love survived that blow, dignity survived, faith and spirit also survived.

Healing might also come from turning in love, appreciation and kindness back to family and friends...for as Rabbi Lawrence Kushner writes: "We meet God in the faces of our parents and our children...for in them we behold our own

birth and death. When we look into the eyes of our children and our grandchildren, our parents and our grandparents, we realize there is something beyond us. We are humbled and graced. We take our place in the long line. That is the root experience of religion.”

Perhaps some of you have seen another one-woman show: written and performed by Ellen Gould called: “Bubbe Meises.” Mrs. Gould describes tragedies in her life – the death of a brother and a sister and cousin – she portrays a pregnant woman excited and consoled by the fetus dancing within her womb. Healing came for her when she realized that all of her loved ones, in some sense danced within her. So it is for us. No matter how crosswise life gets for us – our loved ones will always dance within our souls, strengthening us, anchoring us, even perhaps consoling us.

We ought to, as one clergyman wrote, “Honor the spirits of those souls who God has sent to pave paths, to run interference, to leave a legacy for us. Turning to our unique and special history as Jews brings solace and comfort as well.

After the Holocaust, the most shattering tragedy of the Jewish people, discussions were held about the creation of the Jewish State. Chaim Weizman, who later became the first president of Israel, testified before a British government committee after the end of WWII. One member of the committee said to him, “Professor Weizmann, why do you not simply forget the Land of Israel, and ask your people to take some other land, say in Africa. That would be easier.” Weizmann’s answer was simple: “Sir, that would be like me asking you why you drove thirty miles into the country last week to visit your mother, when there are so many lovely old ladies on your street, you could visit them.” Your own home, your own family, your own faith, are not simply matters of convenience, they are you, and that connection goes deep...setting us right again after we have been blown sideways.

Being connected to a history, a past and a people made the difference for Unabomber survivor David Gelernter. that package he opened in his university office literally blew his life and his body apart. Some time later, still recovering from his many injuries, he recalled those first seconds after the package exploded: “It seemed to me my minutes were numbered, and I needed something to help me concentrate and make it possible to get to the hospital...not very far...across the street...it seemed like a very long walk at the time...but then my mind came up with something appropriate for the circumstance. I had been in Israel a few weeks before and driven with a colleague and her father from the kibbutz into Jerusalem...and my friend’s father was talking about the

war of independence...he was a philosophical sort of guy...I was struck that people like him had picked up rifles and fought. And so, as I was dragging myself over to the clinic, I recalled a Zionist song from that time called "March of the Palmach", playing it in my head along with this image of the struggle for the hills of Jerusalem."

Says, Gelernter: "When you deprive people of history, you deprive them of something that has real value. History is not just an intellectual pursuit. It can literally be a life-saving inspiration."

Dr. Judith Lewis Herman, in her book titled "Trauma and Recovery" says, "Survivors of traumatic events need to reestablish their basic human relationships, reconnect with family, friendship, love and community...and a sense of the Divine Order. She argues that people bonding together in times of tragedy, "creates a climate for healing. Shared trauma is somehow less enduringly painful than a disaster faced in isolation..." Long before modern psychology and psychiatry, Judaism understood this. The Torah itself along with all of its life-saving inspirations, knows how tragedy leaves us shaken.

In Parashat Kedoshim the holiness code, follows after a tragedy, the death of the sons of Aaron. The deaths of Nadav and Avihu interrupt the exciting and important dedication of the original desert tabernacle.

The text does not tell us why they died. Though many commentators offer interpretations, Torah does not offer a list of questions, Torah does not present a theological discussion, Torah does not list reasons, excuses, or explanations for the deaths. Rather Torah acknowledges the tragedy, describes it briefly and then moves on to speak of Acherei Mot, after the tragedy. After the death of Aaron's sons, the text speaks of moving forward; the dedication is completed.

The same might be true of us...after being blown sideways through life, after the inevitable personal explosions and earthquakes, Jews turn not to theology but to family, to connection with Jewish people, to ritual and to a sense of sanctity about living our lives. And in so doing we turn also to God. May that be our source of healing as well. Amen.