

A Women, A Mother and A Rabbi
By Michelle Golland

I knew it was she who I would call when I heard the news. I knew because she is a woman, I knew because she is a mother, I knew because she is my rabbi. We had never even spoken. Her angelic face, milky skin surrounded by wavy locks of black hair seemed to bring a sense of peace when her face moved to a smile on the few occasions we had crossed paths.

As the phone rang I began to go over what I would say on her voice mail. As I was thinking: How is it I find myself here waiting, waiting for a Rabbi I had never really met? A meeting I did not want to have or choose to have but one none the less am compelled to have.

I can see our Sukkah through the den window as I wind the green fringe of the blanket that covers my body between my fingers. It reminds me of tzit tzit. Having a 2 year old little boy and one on the way had left me no energy to dismantle our three sided house, even if it is flimsy. Any guilt for not completing the menial tasks of motherhood has been wiped clean away due to the task which I must now complete.

As I wait to leave a message for the Rabbi, I am startled to hear a live voice, "This is Rabbi Missegehie" she says in her New York accent which is not as delicate as her appearance. I say, "Hi, my name is Michelle" that is all I could get out before I begin to cry. I press my lips together hard, to try to compose myself. After taking a deep breath, I continue awkwardly, "We haven't met, we're new members but I need your help. I'm 6 months pregnant and I just found out I need to terminate this pregnancy, I mean our baby." I discover there is no easy or correct way to say you must end the life of your child. Again, I cry. Her simple, gentle reply, "Can I come over in about an hour?"

She is as compelled to meet me as I to meet her. We are now connected two mothers in one tragedy. As she sits on the end of our sofa, her eyes wet from her own tears. She listens as I explain the rare genetic abnormality that my husband and I passed onto our son which makes his survival to 40 weeks almost impossible and any brief life that may come to him would be difficult, painful and ultimately end in his death.

I just want to mother him the best I can from this point until he dies I explain. The need to have a final resting place for our son's small body was intense and primal for Michael and me. His brief life may have only been lived inside of me but in our hearts we had seen him grow up to be an old man. In our dreams he and Asher were inseparable brothers doing mischievous things. In our dreams he had a bris, a bar mitzvah and a wedding. These dreams were not to be.

When I think of this time in our lives one of the faces that always graces my memories is that of my rabbi helping me bury my son Ozzie on that grey and rainy day in October. My heart was held by hers in those moments, my tears were her tears, and my ache was her ache. As a rabbi she gave me ground to stand upon when my desire was to leap into nothingness. I believe these are moments where we open to God, where we can turn towards rather than turn away. As a women, and mother and now friend I know she will always turn towards me and in the most beautiful way we each open one another to the essence of God.

