



Parshat Lech Lecha
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The Life and Death of Karen Yemima Mosquera
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She was only 20 years old. She lived in Ecuador. She was not Jewish. And then she got the call, *lechi lach*, go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.

Karen Yemima Mosquera heeded that call. She left her home, left Ecuador, left her family, left all that she knew to move to the land of Israel. Intending to convert to Judaism, dreaming of marrying a Jewish man and starting a Jewish family in Israel, she studied Judaism at a women's yeshiva in Jerusalem.

Her parents must have looked out the window of their modest Ecuador home, wondering and worrying how their daughter would fare on her new journey.

Last Wednesday, Karen Yemima Mosquera was waiting at the light rail station in Jerusalem, on her way to study Torah. Just then a Palestinian terrorist, a Hamas murderer, a 21-year old named Abd al-Rahman al-Shaludi, deliberately drove his car into a crowd waiting for their train, trying to kill as many Jews as possible. A security camera video shows Shaludi swerving off the road and accelerating into the crowd. He tried to escape by foot but was shot by Israeli police and later died of his wounds. Seven Israelis were injured. A three-month old named Chaya Zissel Braun was killed instantly. And Karen Yemima Muscara, on the way to meet with her rabbi, was critically injured, succumbing a few days later.

Her funeral was this week. Her parents and her sister were flown in from Ecuador at the Israeli government's expense. Karen's dream was to live in Israel. Karen's parents' dream was to see her dream fulfilled. Her death was a double tragedy. The senseless loss of innocent young

life. And devastation to parents who could pray and hope but who could not protect their beloved daughter.

Our weekly Torah portion always frames our world, and it is so haunting that Karen's funeral takes place when our portion is *lech lecha*. For that is the flip side of the story of Abraham and Sarah's journey. For every story of an adult child's journey, there is always a parent back home left behind, looking out the window, wondering and worrying how their adult child will fare, and praying that their child will be safe. God, please watch over Abraham, please watch over Sarah, as they make their way in the world so far from home.

New journeys are never smooth. New journeys are always bumpy. Abraham and Sarah leave home bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, so excited to begin their journey, so excited to see the land that God would show them. But they no sooner get there than they experience a severe famine; they have to move to Egypt; Sarah is kidnapped and almost raped; Lot is kidnapped; Abraham fights a war against invading kings; they fight with the locals; Sarah cannot get pregnant. That is the painful paradox of parenthood. What we love most, what we want most to protect, we cannot protect. We can worry. We can pace. We can pray. But we cannot protect.

Abraham and Sarah's parents could pray for them but could not protect them.

Karen Yemima Mosquera's parents could not protect her either.

How shall we deal with this most painful of paradoxes? Part of us as parents wants to call a time-out and say: stop. It's not worth the risk. Don't go on your big journey. It's too dangerous. You never know what is going to happen. Who knows what dangers lurk in train stations and school cafeterias, in universities where coeds can be kidnapped and missing. Who knows what emotional disappointments may lie in store, the job our adult child did not get, the

boyfriend or girlfriend break-up that stings. It's a harsh world out there. So stay home. Stay safe. Don't go. You can still dream your dreams, but make them come true in 02458.

We cannot do that. We cannot keep them at home.

We cannot protect our children *from the same frailty and vulnerability to which we ourselves are heir*. That is the human condition.

But the fact that we cannot protect them from harm along the way does not mean that there is nothing we can do. In fact there is one thing we *can* do for our children that is immensely important and if we don't do it, nobody else will.

My colleague David Wolpe recently observed that we live in a cynical age. We live in an age where our heroes are not heroes. Where our heroes are inevitably debunked.

This is true in sports. Many in our community love cycling. And yet the greatest cyclist of our age was finally revealed to have doped through all of his tour de France championships. When he was done lying about it, when he was finally caught with nowhere to go, his defense was, yeah I doped, but everybody doped. It's a dirty sport. If you don't dope, you don't win.

In professional football, one star running back beats his girlfriend in the elevator, another star running back whips his four year old with a tree branch.

Sports heroes are there to be debunked.

So too politicians. With the exception of rare politicians like Mayor Menino, may he rest in peace, and even then it is *acharei mot, kedoshim*, after they die, they're holy, for most living political leaders most of the time it's ugly. Someone is always trying to take you down. Watch the political ads that are airing nowadays in anticipation of Tuesday's election. Both sides run nasty, ad hominem attacks of their opponent.

All of this leads to a corrosive cynicism in which ideals and idealism are hopelessly in

danger of being revealed as naïve. Nobody wants to be naïve. What vibe, what message, are our children picking up?

It's this, the cover of the November 3rd edition of Forbes magazine. A picture of two twenty-nine year old multi-millionaire entrepreneurs, Evan Sharp and Ben Silberman, the founders of Pinterest. The cover says: "Move Over, Zuck Pinterest has a \$5 Billion Valuation and a Revenue Model That Puts Facebook and Twitter to Shame."

That is a message that sells to our children. Work really hard. Get into a good college. Work really hard. Get into a good grad school. Work really hard. Get a good job. Work really hard, earn a good living, buy a big house, live a comfortable life. That's real. That's not naïve. And unlike sports stars and politicians, that cannot be debunked.

Now there is a level at which I celebrate this message. It is good to work hard, to get into a good college, to get a good job, to earn a good living. If our kids dream of founding the next Facebook, or the next Twitter, or the next Pinterest, whatever that is, great.

There's nothing wrong with that, *so long as that's not all we're about*. So long as it's *only part of what we're about*. So long as we make real room and real time and real energy and real resources for ideals and idealism that are larger than us. If I am not for myself, who will be for me. Fine. Go out and found Pinterest. But if I am only for myself, what am I.

Our world today, drenched in cynicism, is in danger of losing the second half of Hillel's equation, that part that soars, the part that is large, the part that is noble, the part that is not about me.

Parents, here is what we can do. In an age of cynicism, we can help our children hold onto their high ideals. In an age where it is all too often about me, me, me, we can help our children also hold onto the part that is not about me.

Parenthood is like bowling. Once we release the ball, it goes where it goes. We can, behind the line, move and shake, twist and shout, cheer and pray, but once we have released the ball, we can no longer control where it goes. This is true for bowling balls and for adult children.

But the bowling analogy is true in another sense as well. While we cannot control where the bowling ball goes once it leaves our hand, we do have some control over the intensity, the passion, the urgency with which we release that ball. There is a difference between a lame release and a passionate release. What intensity, passion urgency are we bringing to the moral universe of our children while they are still under our roof?

That brings us back to Karen Yemima Mosquera. Why was a 20 year old from Ecuador making *aliyah* and converting to Judaism in the first place?

The answer is that she and her parents realized that they had family rituals that other Ecuadorian families did not have. As they explored their curious ritual legacy, they came to understand that their family was descendants of Conversos, of Spanish Jews who were forcibly converted to Catholicism in 1492. For over 500 years, generations of her family had lived as Catholics because of the original sin that they were forced to convert to Catholicism. Karen Yemima Mosquera decided that she was going to bring her family back to Judaism. Move to Israel. Study in a women's yeshiva in Jerusalem. Convert to Judaism. Marry a Jew. Have lots of Jewish children. Reverse the injustice of history. Build a future of hope. That was her high ideal. That was her idealism. That was what caused her to move to Jerusalem.

Her parents could not protect her once she got there. But they could and did inspire her to dream about doing something idealistic with her life. We cannot protect our children from harm. But there is one thing we *can* do: in a cynical age, may we imbue our children with ideals worth living for. Shabbat shalom.