Each of us has a morning ritual, a set routine that we go through from the time we wake up till we arrive at our school or place of work. I would imagine that many of us share similar things in our routines, for me I wake up, brush my teeth, take a shower, and while I am getting dressed I turn on my computer and check my e-mail. Then its a quick bowl of ceral while reading the paper and I am off to fight the LA traffic downtown. Like many of us, when my morning routine is unexpectedly altered, when soemthing comes along in those early morning hours that I was not planning on I get thrown way off kilter, it puts my whole day in dissaray.

A few weeks ago just such an event occured while I was going through the motions of my morning routine, it was unexpected, unimaginable, and I still feel the tremors it has left in my life to this very moment. What I share with you is not an easy thing, but the sanctity and purpose of this day of rememberance call me to bare witness to it and glean some lesson from it.

That morning while checking my e-mail I recieved a message from a faculty member at my school that one of my classmates had died unexpectedly while in New York. Her name was Lauren Neuborne, I did not know her, but as you can imagine those of us in Rabbinical school share a bond and a sense of community that goes beyond aquaintances and friendships; we are not a large school; more like a family.. We share a common purpose, many traveled similar roads to arrive at this place in life and while we have not all met each other along the way we are all fellow travellers. Lauren's death saddens me greatly, I feel like I lost a friend I never knew, a colleague I was never fortunate to work with, and a soulmate who shares my desire to serve the Jewish community and the Jewish people. May her memory be a blessing.

I was about to shut off my computer, yearning now to join my classmates at school and grieve together as a community. I had one more e-mail message to check and reluctantly scrolled down to see who it was

from. In order to read an e-mail on my computer, you first see the name of the person who sent the message and then after clicking on the name the letter they wrote comes into view. I moved my cursor over to click on the name and I realized in shock that the e-mail waiting for me was from Lauren. It was dated only a few hours before she had died but by some quirk of the Internet it had arrived to me after the message of her passing.

I did not want to open the letter, I feared what lay in the unread file. I had recently posted a message to all students offering a New Year's greeting and some resources for the coming year, and I knew that her letter would probably contain the same, an introduction and a greeting for the New Year. With great trepidation, and tears welling up in my eyes, I clicked on her name and accessed the file. In four short sentences, Lauren and her husband Seth had extended to me a New Years greeting, a request for some of the information I had available and thanked me with that universal e-mail character, the sideways happy face.

When I sit and think that her letter was written only hours before her death, a chill runs through my body. I don't want to begin to contemplate the cosmic forces that caused such an eery string of events to unfold on my computer screen. I find it so very hard to comprehend that this young, talented, intelligent, compasionate, and carring woman is now gone from this earth, and when I realize that I was probably one of the last people she communicated with, I feel ill, unworthy. I want to give her back the few moments it took to write me her letter. In many ways I feel responsible for wasting some of her precious minutes with my trivial e-mail that prompted her reply. I think how she could have better used her time, to talk with her husband, offer a prayer, walk in a park. These are things I want to e-mail back to her, I look at my screen, I see the reply button, pressing it, instantaneously generates a reply, all I have to do is fill in the message. I look at that button and I know that instantaneiously is not enough, even if I type really fast, quickly writting her and telling her something, to do

something. I know that won't be fast enough, their is no one their to recieve my message. The death of a women I did not know, has taught me lessons about living I hope I never forget.

The Talmud instructs us never to make our prayers a fixed practice, never to recite the words as if by rote. But instead to find meaning and purpose in our prayer to treat even the smallest opportunity for prayer as if it is our last conversation with God. Their is an obvious lesson in this for our relations with one another as well. Lauren's death has reminded me of a lesson I always seem to forget, to make time in my day to tell people what they mean to me, to saviour not only the moments we know are special, but to make special all of the other moments as well.

We have all lost dear ones, and cried tears as we sat wishing for one more moment with them, one more conversation to tell them how much they meant to us, how much we loved them. In their passing they remined us how much we valued their company, their friendship, their love. In Hebrew we say, z'cron l'bracha, may their memory be a blessing. The blessing of memory is it tries to teach. To reach out to those who are dear to us, to make special the time we spend with one another. The sadness we feel when we look around the sedar table and see the empty chairs of those who are missing, need not be more than the joy we feel sorrounded by so many people we love and care about.

Tonight we said the Kol Nidre prayer, asking God to forgive us all of our unkept vows, our failed resolutions. Somewhere in that list for each of us was the vow to reach out to someone, to tell someone again in a special way that we love them, care for them, value them. We may not have kept the vow this past year, or even in years past, though our intentions were always the best. This evening as our slate is cleaned for another year, let us make our first promise, to tell those dear to us that we love them. Let us truly make the memory of our dear ones a blessing, a blessing in how it prompts us to communicate with one another. It should not take the death of someone dear to us to remind us to tell others what they mean to us. But all to often that is how it works, when life seems at its most fragile state, we reach out to those around us for comfort. But then one day follows another, security returns and with it those special hugs, those phone calls

just to say hi, I am thinking of you become gradually less. It doesn't have to be like this, it shouldn't be like this. The time we have with each other is a precious gift from God, it is what makes life special. The loss we feel for our loved ones is evidence of that enough. Let us not waste this time, but make every moment count, every word matter, every feeling and emotion sincere. If our prayer is not to be a fixed task, then even the more so our interactions with one another should not be fixed. Let us chose this moment, on this Day of Rememberance, not only to remember those who have passed on, but also to turn to our loved ones, before another moment passes by, and tell them that we love them, and are glad they are here. May this be the blessing of our new year.