

These are the words I said about Erez Orbach this past shabbat at skokie valley.

"This past Sunday, my beloved nephew Erez, was killed in a terrorist attack in Jerusalem. In the 24 hours I spent with my family at the shiva I learned what an amazing person Erez was, and what a special person and one of a kind mother my sister Caryn is.

Erez was 20 years old when he was killed, the oldest of six. When he was 2.5 months old, he was diagnosed with a rare blood disease. When they took Erez for treatment, Caryn made a pact with Hashem- I promise to be the best mother I can be, and you will give him as many years as you can. Erez continued his life with the disease. When Erez was 11 years old, he was suppose to volunteer with his friends in a preschool. The evening before he told his mother that he doesn't want to go because he doesn't want the kids to be afraid of him, due of his pale skin that was an outcome of his disease. Caryn told him something that led him through life- "There are no difficulties, there are only lessons to be learned". She told him that if you look at things as difficulties, it is like putting a wall in front of you and then you get stuck, if you look at them as lessons, you can overcome, learn new things about yourself and move on, this is how Erez lived his life. Quietly, positively and always with a smile on his face, Erez learned from everything that happened in his life and moved on, knowing that there are lots of lessons to be learned.

When Erez was a junior in highschool, he decided that he will enlist to the army even though he wasn't obligated to. It took him a year and a half of convincing the army that he could be a soldier. One of the doctors he saw during this long process told him that most of the people he sees are looking for reasons not to go to the army, so why is he trying so hard to? Erez simply answered that it is his duty to serve his country just like the rest of his friends.

After finishing high school, Erez learned for a little over a year at Yeshivat Maalot. During this time Erez learned a lot and became very knowledgeable. During the shiva I talked to one of his chavrutot, and he said that you never would know that Erez was so knowledgeable- he always listened carefully and respected your opinion.

When Erez finally got accepted to the army, he served in the air force and was in charge of the tools in the bace. When he came home for the first time, Caryn asked him what his job was, she was so excited for him! Erez told her that it's a simple job, and seemed disappointed. Caryn told him that whatever he makes out of it, is what the job will be, and Erez did make a lot out of it. After a couple of months Erez decided that every week he will choose the best soldier of the week. Every Thursday he would send a poem in the units whatsapp group, announcing "the soldier of the week".

Three months into army service Erez decided that he wants to become an officer, a very rare thing for a volunteer, again living the idea of "There are no difficulties, only lessons to be learned". When talking to his officer, the answer was- we will see... Erez then told him: "You don't understand, i'm not asking you if i am going to officers course i'm asking you when I will

go". After what would look to all of us as a difficulty, and to him as a lesson to be learned, he was accepted into officers course.

When my friends came to visit me during the shiva we talked about how all the soldiers that we know that have fallen, were perfect in a way- tall, handsome and perfect, Erez was not. He wasn't very tall, not the best looking but he was very special, because he overcame and learned lots of great lessons along the way.

I was thinking to myself during the shiva, where does all this strength come from? I think that a big portion of this comes from his mother- Caryn. I noticed three things that she does. The first one is unconditional love- Erez was loved all the time no matter what. At times, when a person dies all of a sudden, his loved ones say that they wish they would have told him how much they loved him, this was not the case with Erez, he knew his mother loved him, unconditionally, all the time.

The second thing was giving him the power to keep going- "There are no difficulties, there are only lessons to be learned", and the third thing is believing in him. Ever since he was a child, Caryn trusted him and she knew he would make the right choices.

During the shiva, my oldest sister invited different speakers to talk and share words of torah. One night, there were two speakers- Esti Rozenberg and Hadassa Fruman. They talked about a saying in masechet shabbat- "כל המזיל דמעות על אדם כשר הקב"ה שומרם בבית גזיו"- When people cry about an honest man, Hashem keeps the tears in his house of treasures. This saying tells us first of all that at times like these we are obligated to cry, and that Hashem is in a way crying together with us.

Caryn cried a lot, and she laughed a lot, she listened a lot and she talked a lot. She cried when she understood that Erez is not coming back, she laughed when she heard funny stories about Erez and she talked about Erez to whoever wanted to listen and learn about him- Family, friends of his from high school, the yeshiva, army and other parts of his life, and to high ranking officers, kneset members, and even to president Rivlin.

Together with Caryn all of Am Yisrael was mourning the loss of Erez. Caryn shifted during the shiva from her own personal grieving to giving interviews, talking to members of the kneset, and reporters. Caryn was amazing in her clear understanding that other than her being a mother grieving her son, she also has a job- to tell everyone about Erez, what a special person he was and how much we have to learn from him about ourselves and our own lives. So many people came to show their condolences, from Israel and abroad, and every person that came gave her more spirit to deal with her terrible loss.

Erez had a unique status on his whatsapp, a quote from the Chazon Ish:

חובת האדם בעולמו, כל עוד הנשמה בקרבו, להיות הולך וגדל.

A person is obligated, as long as he shall live, to keep growing spiritually.

Erez lived this motto during his lifetime and I think that we should all learn this important lesson."

יהי זכרו ברוך