

# Kindness in the Face of Loss

Category: New Voices

written by Yuval Topper | September 4, 2024



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I've just received a call from a hospital: An urgent appointment at its fetal-medicine unit has been arranged for me for tomorrow.

I try to get all the critical information.

"Which hospital did you say?" I ask. The medical secretary repeats the name, sounding a little surprised. I haven't heard of this hospital; but then, I haven't really heard of any, except for our local one.

I try to commit the information to memory—which building and what time (of course I don't have a pen or computer handy!)—while my two kids play noisily in the background.

"My spouse is away on business until tomorrow evening," I say. "Can the appointment be delayed until they get back?"

"I'm so sorry; I'm afraid it can't," the secretary says.

Only after putting the phone down do I realize that I didn't ask an important question: Do they know that I'm trans?

Later that day, I begin bleeding.

Up till now, everything has felt completely normal. It's my third pregnancy,

and we had expected it to be pretty straightforward, like the previous two. I haven't even suffered from morning (or, let's face it, all-day) sickness, as I did with the previous one.

In fact, I've just returned from a short, enjoyable holiday in Florence, staying with Israeli friends and gaining some much-needed "me" time before I'm tied down again as a full-time homeschooling parent with a newborn.

I spent my time in Florence going to museums, crossing the Piazza del Duomo and eating wonderful food and plenty of ice cream.

A day after my return, I received a message from the local NHS midwife: "Something has come up in your blood test. Call me. Nothing to worry about."

We called. The standard laboratory tests had discovered rare antibodies in my blood that the midwife couldn't explain. By day's end (and after hours of research—my partner works in the life-science industry), it transpired that the midwife was wrong: There *was* reason for concern.

And now this. An urgent appointment with a specialist in Leeds, the closest big city, has augured a case that the local hospital can't handle; and now I'm bleeding.

Wondering if I'll need to go to the hospital emergency room, I begin making arrangements for the kids to stay with one of the relatively scanty group of friends we've made since moving to England from Israel (and away from our extended families) less than eighteen months ago.

I shudder to think that the midwife's call, and the bleeding, might have happened a week ago, in what now seems a different, more innocent, even clueless life in which I was traveling alone, in a country where I knew no one locally and didn't speak the language. The thought of going alone to a hospital, even here in England, makes me nervous enough as it is.

To be fair, it would have been difficult in Israel as well. Although we had a wonderful doctor throughout my previous pregnancies, when we experienced an emergency and went to a local hospital, I was outed by the media as the first Israeli pregnant man, and I experienced a lot of transphobia there as well; that was one reason we decided to leave Israel.

Still, I can't help but imagine how things might have gone if I'd been in Italy. I picture myself appearing in an Italian A&E program. With my flat chest and beard, I look unmistakably male; how would I even begin to explain that I was pregnant and bleeding?

One thing I do know: No matter how this pregnancy resolves, I will never again travel alone while pregnant—especially not to a foreign country.

I toss and turn with these thoughts all night; thankfully, the bleeding stops by morning, and I don't have to go to the hospital before my scheduled appointment.

The morning is sunny and bright, and since the bleeding has stopped, I'm

hoping that the day will bring some reassuring news.

Although we've met only once before this, I ask a private midwife I'm considering hiring to accompany me to my appointment with the specialist, so I won't be alone. After a brief intake, without being misgendered or fielding even a raised eyebrow, I tell the specialist, "I had some bleeding last night."

"Should we have a look, then?" she says. I get onto the bed and lift my shirt up. She spreads gel on my abdomen. The ultrasound takes only a few seconds.

"I'm sorry," she says, her voice full of compassion. "I'm afraid the baby has no heartbeat."

The midwife extends her hand to me. I take it and hold on as the world spins around me and stops still, both at the same time.

"May I continue the ultrasound?" the specialist asks gently, waiting for my consent. Together we watch the lifeless baby floating inside my womb. There is no apparent cause of death.

After I'm dressed, she tells me the options: I can have a chemically induced miscarriage; I can go in for a D&C; or I can wait for the pregnancy to end naturally. This is my preferred choice, and I steel myself to fight for it. In Israel, it's almost unheard of to wait for miscarriages to come to a natural end.

"Very well," she says calmly, then explains what to expect, ending, "We'll be here, should you need anything."

Later on, as I sit in a private room drinking a cup of tea, one of the midwives comes in.

"May I ask what your preferred pronouns are?" she asks. "It's for the discharge letter I'm preparing. Do you prefer 'he' or 'they'?" Then she continues, "Do you have any feedback, or could we have done anything differently?" I shake my head, astonished. Never before have I been treated with such respect and compassion by newly encountered medical professionals who have not undergone some preparation on my behalf.

"Have the people on your team ever treated pregnant trans people in the past?" I ask.

"No, we haven't," she says, to my surprise.

I reflect that they've obviously had good training. In the days ahead, I will tell people again and again, in utter amazement, that I was asked if I use "he" or "they." In Israel, I'd invariably been misgendered—called "she" or even "he/she" or "it."

I also realize that even more important than these medical professionals' good training was the fact that they happened to be kind, respectful and caring people. And what a difference that made to me.

Looking back, I know that this was a vital part of the story of that day, no less than the sadness.