

The tide comes in. The tide goes out. We change and grow and remember and forget. We promise and love and argue and regret. As I round this corner I hold onto the vision of the pages I have turned before. The intentions and pledges; the good faith efforts and the intimations; the sworn oaths and the solemn vows; the deeds that speak for my words, and the words that sometimes mean what you hear but often are just wishes borne on the air.

Life can be a sweeping arc from which I can see points in the past, or envision things in the future. But on this night I seek to account for all of it: not to just reflect on where I am at this moment but to embrace its past and its potential, to account for what I have done and what I will do.

As I reflect on the year past and the year ahead, I weigh the time that carries my life. I feel the memory of what I have gained and who I have lost. I smile at what I have helped to create; I twinge to recall what I now regret; I sigh at the hazy shape of things that I can only recall through uncertain memory. I try to preserve what has been special and meaningful, but not try too hard because I want to be supple and open to the world that dawns each day, and the chance to create anew is an honor.

I feel uniquely honored – as unique as possible considering it is a vantage shared by billions of us – to see the world and the cosmos from this moment, where we can gaze across a span of time and space, and where the human condition in our world encompasses the great and the tragic.

We balance a sense of time with timeless values. There are humans who awoke this morning who are peering back to the dawn of time as we measure it. Scientific inquiry has given humanity a perspective on the universe that is beyond human scale. Yet with this lens on the origins of time, we still have an obligation to treat one another today with dignity and compassion that is independent of time.

I am awestruck by the complexity of weight and weightlessness. Science has delivered more understanding and insight to us than perhaps any people have ever been granted; yet if this knowledge is a burden it is one we seem to carry lightly. Black holes are remote; black magic has greater gravity for many people.

More than anything I am almost stunned by the collision of civilization and incivility, whether it is the blind, raging faith of jihad or locally grown smug disdain. How did we come to straddle millennia of human development at this point of history, and what does it say about humanity that it is so ready to self-extinguish – that there is such indifference to misery in the world? I don't know.

But even as I grapple with these contradictions and complementary things – I still care what pattern of socks I wear each day. I still rejoice in material and simple pleasures. I still enjoy a joke, and a football game, and I won't get into food tonight.

But perhaps that just proves a point, that we do occupy a vantage where selflessness and selfishness coexist, neither untouched by the other. To atone, to be at one, we must embrace this complexity in each of us and tolerate ourselves as we propel ourselves to do right, to forgive others, to wipe the slate but not break it.

Acceptance and forgiveness and resolve are what I think and feel as I stand before you tonight.

I would like to share a little of what this year has brought to me.

The sadness of my father's death – this unwelcome and yet not unexpected loss felt by so many – has been an entry into a club I never wanted to join, and I feel new empathy for all who have lost a parent. Every person's experience of death is unique and important; for me, it is not something from which to recover, but to embody and accept and to honor the person who lives in love and memory. I have a sense of motion and emotion. I feel as if I am seeing life through an amber lens; when I stop and reflect I get the picture that life is missing someone; when I am still, I see the world with a tinted feeling of loss and a wish to return to a time that was.

My dad's passing was sudden and catalyzing. I feared it for years. I understand mourning in a way I never had before, and I feel as if I have grown another layer yet stripped away a layer at the same time. Death is an integral part of life, but this is less an abstraction than an instruction to treat our mortality with love and kindness. Keep people close to you in their lifetimes that you may feel their presence throughout yours.

In the Spring, after a long campaign I was elected to a certain position in my community, the board of selectmen, and to the extent that one of my true religions is civics this was a wonderful thing. As much as the election brought opportunities for stuff like change, empowerment and accountability, on a personal level it has been illuminating for its insight into how people see things, how they work

together to sometimes make things happen, and perhaps how early childhood emotional development is much more important than we realize. The psychology of public interaction is amazing and I marvel at how the public will wends its way through power. It is an endless procession of events and perception that requires patience and people skills to achieve results.

Our son Jonah, who will be 25 in the year 2010, is now studying mathematics for the semester in the formerly placid Budapest, where political unrest has recently surfaced so that his mother and I have something to worry about, even as his growth and love of learning bloom and his future begins to unfold. Math and aftermath.

So it has been quite a year – yet a year of reaping that which was sown.

So at this Kol Nidre, a contemplative moment, let us accept the endless span within us – let's reach deep inside and far outside to account for the breadth of humanity at this point in time, and let us move forward with remembrance; try to balance humility and integrity; savor that which is fleeting and touch that which endures; honor those whom we have lost by imagining and creating good things to come.