


sorrow even at times of joy such as Shabbat.

When I meet the eyes of each of you sitting in the Sanctuary on these evenings and encourage you to share the names of your family members or friends who are ill, the seriousness in the room is palpable. Sometimes there are many names to share, sometimes just a few. Sometimes it is the first our congregation hears that one among us is facing injury or surgery. Sometimes there are tears. Always, there is a feeling that we are held together in a web of caring and connection, whether our prayer is for someone we know or don't know, or whether we ourselves are recovering from a bad blow and leaning on B'nai Tikvah for solace.

The Talmud tells us that one who visits the sick removes one sixtieth of that person's illness. Why one sixtieth? It's a curious fraction to be sure. Perhaps this teaching is communicating something about both our capabilities and our limitations when it comes to caring for those living through dark times of sickness and suffering. Our prayers cannot take away someone's difficult or diminished circumstances. On the other hand, the knowledge that we are thinking of them and including them in our *Mi Shebeirach* has the potential to let the light in, even if just a little bit. It is also a healing opportunity for the pray-ers



year that at least has the potential to be more hopeful.

I am writing this article just days after the Ghost Ship warehouse fire in Oakland that took the lives of 36 beautiful young souls as they were celebrating the night away. There were so many articles going around about how, at a different time or place, it could have been any of us. And yet, it took the media no time at all to begin demonizing and blaming whomever they could: the landlord, the city of Oakland, the young people themselves for choosing to live and celebrate life in a risky and dangerous space. Where is the compassion in that kind of response to tragedy? Where is the love? Where is God in that kind of blame and shame?

As I set my own intentions for 2017, I keep hearing three words swirling around my head: compassion, empathy and joy. We have no idea what will come our way this year. Try as we might to control everything, the hard truth is that unexpected wonderful and terrible things happen all the time. It is how we respond to those things that gives meaning to our lives.

Compassion, according to Dr. Brene Brown, is "the deeply held belief that we are inextricably connected to each other by some-thing, which makes us all..."