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August 16, 2008: We Don't Want Justice

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Title: We Don't Want Justice

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8/16/2008--What is the most important prayer in Judaism? Probably, most Jews would answer the Sh'ma—the prayer of monotheistic affirmation of peoplehood. But, I think the most important prayer is prayed on the night of Yom Kippur and says “Let no one be punished for my sake.” This is a sensible prayer to say on the day that a Jew is asking God for forgiveness. After all, I am praying not to be punished for what I have done. I should, therefore, not want punishment for what others have done to me. That is logical, but in my experience it is impossible. I have tried to pray this prayer every year and yet I still want certain people to die alone in a ditch. Soon. I can't seem to help it. And most people I know are like me. Because I cannot say this prayer with a full heart, I have been unable to genuinely move on in my life. Judaism is offering me a structure of liberation. And I am clinging instead to wrongs done to me in the past. But I think this year will finally be different. There are two reasons for this. First, someone I love is doing something bad. I can foresee disaster. And I don't want that disaster to occur, even though this person deserves that outcome. So, I don't want justice to happen. It's interesting that I could never look at it that way before because I thought the person who wronged me acted so terribly that I was innocent in comparison. I do bad things too, but not as bad as what had been done to me. So I thought I was justified in wanting my vengeance. But now, now that someone I love is at risk, I don't want vengeance. I now want grace. That is the reason that this year I think I can pray, let no one be punished for what they have done, including those who have wronged me. Let my loved ones also not be punished for what they have done. I said there was a second reason and it is related. I just read that we might see an ice-free summer Arctic Ocean by 2013—a mere five years. The previous prediction had been 60 years. Humankind deserves disaster for our willful and reckless alteration of the world's climate. And I hope that will not happen, for the sake of my children and their children. So, justice seems too dangerous right now. And maybe that is the whole point of a day of atonement and prayers for forgiveness. Even if I cannot forgive, and though I certainly will not forget, I don't want bad things to happen to bad people. I know too many.