

We owe it to Shira

DOV LIPMAN | AUGUST 4, 2015, 11:00 PM |

As I drove home Monday evening from the funeral of Shira Banki – the 16-year-old girl who was murdered by a religious fanatic at the Jerusalem gay pride parade — I could not escape the pain and anguish I had just witnessed. How did we get here? How could this tragic killing have happened?

I also thought about all the recent tragic events and tensions in Israel and began imagining a world where we “got it right.”

This led me to recall the news last week that NASA astronomers discovered a planet unlike any ever seen before. Called Kepler 452b – a.k.a. ‘Earth 2.0’ – this planet 1,400 light years from Earth is the closest thing to an “Earth twin” ever discovered. It is the first planet ever found to be orbiting a sun-like star at a distance from its sun that allows for conditions that, just like Earth, are neither too hot nor too cold for life as we know it to exist.

I began to wonder: Is the comparison to Earth limited to the physical characteristics that allow for life? If life actually does exist there, is it different from ours?

I wonder if there are different religions there, and are they a basis for dialogue and improving their world, and not a source of tension and war?

I wonder if their spiritual leaders are motivated by a sincere desire to uplift their people, as opposed to desiring power which they can abuse for personal gain and pleasure.

I wonder if those spiritual leaders seek solutions to ease the pain and difficulties of the lives of the inhabitants, instead of making things more difficult for them.

I wonder if their spiritual leaders allow everyone to worship as they wish, as opposed to forcing one religious approach on the masses.

I wonder if their schools teach real life skills and values.

I wonder if the inhabitants of that planet treat each other with respect, regardless of their color.

I wonder if they make sure to accept and not to humiliate those who, in their private lives, act differently than the mainstream.

I wonder if they have different genders living there which find a way to interact with complete equality and respect.

I wonder if their planet includes creatures that are similar to our animals, and whether the inhabitants treat them as creations of God, with care and without any abuse.

I wonder if the inhabitants of Kepler 452b take care of their planet, respect the environment, and guard their land, water and air resources.

I wonder if the leaders there recognize that their huge sun is a source of energy that should be treasured and used for clean, renewable energy, instead of damaging energy sources that have a negative impact on their health and environment.

I wonder if they drive vehicles on Kepler 452b and whether the inhabitants are committed to safety, focusing on the task at hand and not simultaneously undertaking distractions that put lives at risk.

I wonder if the inhabitants recognize that extremism doesn't work, and that the only way to make progress on any issue is through dialogue, compromise, and understanding.

I wonder if their political leaders seek office in order to lead and make their world a better place, instead of for the glory, honor, and personal gain such positions offer.

Further analysis of Kepler 452b could bring us one step closer to finding life in an alien solar system. If that life up there is anything like I imagined, it will be well worth the 1,400 light-year trip for us Earthlings to learn how we can "get it right" down here.

We owe it to Shira to do so. And we owe it to ourselves.