

Rabbi Michael A. White
Temple Sinai of Roslyn
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I have noticed that there is an uncertain, uncomfortable moment at the end of a funeral at graveside. The Kaddish has been spoken. The earth has been shoveled into the grave, and then it's time to leave, time to return home, time to begin shiva. Yet we can sense this invisible tug at us, causing us to resist leaving the cemetery, because leaving means facing the truth that our beloved one is truly gone. And will not return.

We resist death's permanency. Every fiber of our being viscerally rejects it. Edna St. Vincent Millay, in her 1928 poem, "Dirge with Music", so eloquently captures our rebellion against death:

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave.
Gently they go, the beautiful,
the tender, the kind;
Quietly they go, the intelligent,
the witty, the brave.
I know. But I do not approve.
And I am not resigned.

When someone we love passes away it ushers a solitary journey, a journey we did not choose into a future we cannot picture. What will life be like now, without seeing his face? What will I do when the phone doesn't ring in the morning? How can I begin the day without hearing her voice? Yet it is also the most well travelled journey humanity knows. And at this sacred Yizkor hour, on this most solemn day, we sit together, shoulder to shoulder, with our fellow travelers.

For some among us, this is your first Yizkor. One among many "firsts." The first birthdays. The first Mother's Day or Father's Day. And tonight the first Break Fast. For those whose loss is new, look around this sanctuary now and you will see so many here who had descended into the valley of grief long before you, some years before, some decades before. Know that, with time, we found the strength to climb back life, even back to joy and appreciating blessings, and you will, too.

From whence the strength to make that climb? It begins with love and support from family and friends, who listen to us, who shed tears with us. The shoulders we lean on, reminding us that even with grief, there is light and love, and the joy of companionship.

Strength also comes from the healing power of memory. Memories of the transformative moments, the weddings and bar mitzvahs and graduations. Memories of Thanksgivings and Chanukah. But also memories of the every day simple moments, too.

A family gathered in my study to plan their patriarch's funeral. I asked his wife of more than six decades when she first knew she loved him. She said, "We were walking home from the dance, where we met. It was cold and drizzling. He took off his coat and wrapped me in it. That's when I knew."

She told me she hadn't thought of that moment in all these years, but in my study she could remember the feel of that coat's fabric on her shoulders. All these years later, and that memory, buried deep within her, emerged, just when she needed it, to give her a bit of solace, and a reason to smile.

At graveside we recite Job's words: "The Lord has given. The Lord has taken away. Praised be the name of the Lord." At first glance, these words seem so cold and unfeeling. I must offer praise as I stand at the open grave? But Job's words convey the hope that, with time, and surrounded by love, we will be able to remember all that has been given to us even as we suffer the grief of what has been taken away, to measure our joy against the pain, and find our way to gratitude.

Job's words assure us that there will come a simcha that he would have loved to attend, and should have attended, and we will somehow sense that he is with us, and we are comforted. We will arrive at a crossroads, knowing that she would have been the one to help us choose the right path, and somehow we know what she would have said, and we are pleasantly aware that she is near. Yes, they were taken away, and yet we know that what they gave us transcends death's darkness.

We see that death does not erase their gifts of wisdom and their strength. Death cannot change the myriad ways that affirm that we are who we are because they walked beside us, because they carried us, because they embraced us.

The blessing Job offers is that beyond the finality of death is eternal life. God gathers into his embrace the souls of our loved ones, protecting them for eternity. While we must learn to let them go; while we must learn to live and to be without them. They are ok. In God's care. And again, that beyond the pain of separation is a treasure of memories that cannot be taken away. Memories that light our paths; that strengthen us when we feel weak or lost, memories that bring smiles and laughter; memories that affirm that even though life is too short for our dreams, it brings gifts that bless us forever.