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Soon the blast of the Shofar will draw Yom Kippur to conclusion. Our bodies are depleted. Our prayer book's accusations have hammered away at our egos and our defenses. They have forced us to look inward, to survey and examine where we are in our lives.

And now as this Yom Kippur day begins to fade from us, we bring to mind loved ones of blessed memory. They are gone from this world, but at this yizkor hour we recognize that they are still pleasantly with us; their continued blessed presence fills our hearts and minds.

We think of them now and a montage of memories move through us. Times of laughter, of intimate companionship, of embraces. Moments of weakness when their strength carried us through. Moments of sadness when their words and their love, softened the blows. And we realize that these memories demand gratitude, demand that we remember not only what we have lost, but what of them remains with us, what death can never take away.

Judaism is first among religions in recognizing the dark throb of grief. Our traditions, beginning with the tearing of the ribbon and the shoveling of the earth, refuse to deny its harsh pain.

When death strikes someone we loved, we walk numb among the living, bearing our anger, drained of spirit, fearful of facing the nights alone, of the empty place at the table, of the phone that doesn't ring.

And then, some time later, we awaken and the pain has eased somewhat. We find that we laugh again, that we feel confident as we face the day again, that we enjoy our friends and our family again. And after the smiles, after our hearts fill with some measure of joy, we realize that we have moved through the valley of the shadow of death, and back into the sunlight of the living.

We find that our days contain more love than grief, more blessing than anger and loneliness. And when the ache of loss does return, as at this Yizkor hour, we know that the tears and the pain will be with us only for a while; that blessing and joy will soon replace them, and we will know that the worst is in the past.

Whence does the healing, the strength come? Certainly from those close to us. Good friends and family, who know what to say and when to stay silent. Whose comforting presence and embraces wash over us like a soothing balm.

It comes naturally from within. From our own innate capacity for healing. It gently guides us through the dark times and back to living with a sense of purpose, back to a strengthened spirit, back to giving and receiving love. And the Source of our natural inclination to heal is the Holy One. The Lord who is My Shepherd, who leads me beside the still waters and restores my soul.

Finally, strength comes from those we mourn today, from our loved ones now gone from view. From their love for us, their guidance, their companionship when they walked beside us among the living; they create a bridge joining this world to the next; teaching us that our loved ones never really leave us.

Elie Wiesel writes of his first visit back home to his village in France. *I met a Jew,*” he writes, *“one of the rare survivors, and we walked through the cemetery of Sighet. “To be a Jew,” I asked, “what does it mean to you? Does it mean turning your heart into a cemetery?” “No,” my companion said. “... The heart of a man is a sanctuary... To be a Jew is to fill the sanctuary with light, without betraying the cemetery.”*

This is the task all mourners face, especially at this Yiskor hour. To know that it is not a betrayal to let go of the cemetery, to let go of the pain. That we pay them the greatest honor when we remember our beloved with the light of gratitude, by recalling the gifts of their hearts.

Poet Merrit Malloy wrote these words:

When I die
If you need to weep
Cry for someone
Walking the street beside you.

And when you need me
Put your arms around others
And give them what you need to give me.

You can love me most by letting
Hands touch hands, and
Souls touch souls.

You can love me most by
Sharing your joys
Multiplying your good deeds.

You can love me most by
Letting me live in your eyes

And when you say Kaddish for me

Remember what our Torah teaches,
Love does not die.

So when all that's left is love,
Give me away.