

Death Trumps all...But Life is Our Wildcard
YIZKOR 5783/2022- Rabbi Mara S. Nathan

Death trumps all. When someone in our congregation dies, their family gets our full attention as members of our staff work to coordinate plans and clergy reach out to connect and help lead the mourners through the Jewish rituals that are meant to quickly follow.

Death trumps all. It doesn't care what plans you had, what trip was scheduled, what work project was due, what lifecycle event was on the horizon. When it is time, it is time.

Time is a funny thing. There are moments when it seems to move so slowly and others when it disappears. When someone we love is reaching the end of their life, we may vacillate in our feelings about it. On one hand, we wish our beloved could be there forever. We want time to slow down so that we can be together...just a little longer...to hold hands, remember better times, plan for the future.

On the other, we pray for them to be released from suffering and or pain. We want the time of their passing to come more quickly so that they will be "at peace." But time is just time...it moves forward relentlessly whether we like it or not.

Most everyone is afraid of death except those who are close to it, writes Rabbi Steve Leder in his book, *The Beauty of What Remains*...They may worry about us, the living whom they love and will leave behind. "But," writes Leder, "after more than thirty years of tending to the actively dying, when I ask them if they are afraid, the answer has always been...no."¹

So, the fear, is mostly ours...those who are left behind. Because we are the ones that are left to face time and we fear the unknown. What will our days feel like, without them in the world? What will Passover be like, without his tzimis, without her mandel bread, without their off key singing of Chad Gad Ya?

Who will I call when I have good news, or when I am sad? How will I ever laugh again? When will it feel ok to feel joy or anticipation or hope?

Eventually we all come to know that while Death Trumps All, Life is the wildcard we hold in our hands. "It is human nature to embrace life- even in the face of tragedy", writes Leder. "Not because we forget our sorrow, not because we do not ache sometimes, but because we are human, with a miraculous capacity to move forward in life despite the worst pain of death and grief."²

¹Rabbi Steve Leder, **The Beauty of What Remains: How our Greatest Fears Become our Greatest Gift**, p.37

² Rabbi Steve Leder, **The Beauty of What Remains: How our Greatest Fears Become our Greatest Gift**, p.37

But at this particular hour, in this moment, we can give ourselves permission to not move forward but instead to just be. To experience how death trumps all. Sitting here in our sanctuary, surrounded by others who have also felt this truth, we know we are in good company.

As Rabbi Karyn Kedar reflects: “We come with an unspoken agreement to be vulnerable, to feel, to weep. We settle into our seats, take the time to breathe and to remember. Our minds wander as we listen to the sounds of people immersed in thought and to the melodies and feel, truly feel, loss and melancholy. We feel the beating of our heart. We feel the ache.”³

So let us remember the one’s we’ve lost. Let us give in to nostalgia and reverie if only for this hour. And let us remember that as long as we have it- that wild card of life compels us to live and laugh and love with everything our loved ones have given us...in our hearts forever.⁴

Yizkor, we remember...

³ Ode to Morality, *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism*, Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman editor

⁴ Rabbi Steve Leder, **The Beauty of What Remains: How our Greatest Fears Become our Greatest Gift**, p.37