

YIZKOR-5782
Rabbi Mara Nathan

Though it is late in the day, we have gathered as we always do. Here in the Sanctuary, or perhaps on livestream. To honor the memory of those we have loved and lost.

So much of what we have taken for granted in the past, has been altered. The way we communicate, the way we gather, even the way we grieve.

19 months of memorials and burials in various states of separation has taken a toll on us all. And while we thank God for technology and the means to access it, there is no doubt that we have not been able to pay tribute to our loved ones, to our cherished Temple members in the ways that we would like. And yet....we are survivors. We each find ways to move forward.

After the initial intense pain of lose has receded, we are still left with sadness, with longing, for some...with loneliness. And while well meaning folks will coax us to move on, we know that this isn't quite possible. And anyway, why would we want to leave behind the love, the companionship, the scents and sounds of one who was precious to us? Many of us would prefer to cultivate our memories and strengthen bonds...even if it is only in our imaginations.

As author, Anakana Schofield explains: "Our loved continue to live with us in the moments when we are sad and terrified. They cheer for us. They give us unbelievable strength and the courage we lack to carry on in situations. They coax us through. They lead us where we need to be, to experience the joy and capability that was them. They who have been with us in life manage to teach us how and where in death we can listen for them and find their voices and essence again."¹

I think about my mother's father in this way. We called him Pappa Shev. I was only 8 years old when he died. And even though most of my memories are constructed from photographs and stories from when I was too young to remember it is clear from the way my mother speaks of him- that his strength of character, his grit and love helped form her into the person who inspires me.

He grew up during the depression. Dropped out of High School to help support his family. Made a living selling Fuller brushes door to door. Got his GED....graduated from college when he was in his 50s...and encouraged my mother- not only to go to college but to leave her small town, to enroll at NYU for graduate school and build a life for herself.

I know that there have been times when my parents pushed us forward encouraged us to leave home.... urged us to take chances, helped us move on from disappointment or defeat that my grandfather's voice was lifting them up and giving *them* courage.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/06/opinion/assisted-death-grief.html>

And despite their fears they listened and gifted that courage forward...to me, to my brother and to my sister. And each of us in our own way has tried to do the same as our children grow and mature.

“In the west of Ireland, in County Mayo” ...writes Schofield, “There is a lovely tradition of attributing words or phrases to people. If they are dead, you add an acknowledgement after their name along the lines of “May the Lord have mercy on their soul.” ...I love how this reignites the spirit of a deceased person you may or may not have known. You can build an entire sense of someone you never met from hearing their expressions. And for those who knew them, that person can live again in the utterance of those sayings.....”²

Judaism too has a millennia old practice of attributing teachings and stories to the sages who came before us. Adding a ‘zichrona l’vracha’ ‘of blessed memory’ when that person is gone.

But that connective tradition is just as powerful when we attribute stories, sayings, songs to the ones who *taught US* regardless of their public persona. The words spoken by those we love help shape us in indelible ways. And even if those words only point to something that can never be touched by language, there is comfort, still, to be had in the remembering.³

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² <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/06/opinion/assisted-death-grief.html>

³ p.14, Sale, Anna, Lets Talk About Hard Things