



Yizkor 5779 - Yom Kippur - Rabbi Aaron Alexander

On Shabbat mornings I often arrive to Adas pretty early. I love the quiet, empty building-- and as you know, that's very, very rare here. I usually bring Ariel with me, my oldest son, all of 8 years. He sits in his chair and organizes his YuGIOH cards - don't ask. It's like Pokeman, but on steroids. And I sit at my desk and read from the stack of books I put aside but don't have time to get to during the week.

We occasionally banter, share some sugar products, and maybe raid the kitchen. But mostly we are just quiet: Alone, but together. It's pretty much my favorite time of the week.

And then two Shabbatot ago he turned to me and saw the tears, one by one, slowly sliding down my face. He asked, innocently, "are you crying?"

"Yes," I said. "Why are you crying?"

I pointed to a picture next to me, and then to the book in front of me-- Because I miss Bubbie. And this page I'm reading reminded me of that.

I miss Bubbe too, Daddy. [Back to Yugioh!]

Here's the poem I was reading that unexpectedly cracked me open, my wounds unhidden:

FAREWELL LETTER -- David Whyte

*She wrote me a letter after her death,
and I remember a kind of happy light falling on the envelope as I sat by the rose tree,
on her old bench, at the back door, so surprised by its arrival,
wondering what she would say, looking up before I could open it
and laughing to myself in silent expectation:*

*Dear son, it is time for me to leave You.
I am afraid that the words You are used to hearing
are no longer mine to give, they are gone and mingled
back in the world where it is no longer in my power to be their first original author
nor their last loving bearer.*

*You can hear motherly words of affection now only from your own mouth when you
speak them to those who stand motherless before You.*

*As for me I must forsake adulthood and be bound gladly to a new childhood.
You must understand this apprenticeship demands of me an elemental innocence
from everything I ever held in my hands.*

*I know your generous soul is well able to let me go, you will in the end be happy to
know my God was true and I find myself, after loving You all so long, in the wide,
infinite mercy of being mothered myself. P.S. All your intuitions were true.*

We spend a lot of time wondering what they'd say, don't we?

It doesn't matter that we may have ignored the advice while they were alive. That's one of the many ironies, mysteries of loss--not wanting it until you can't have it, maybe still not wanting it, but needing, desperately, to want it.

And that's why we are this room, together, today. All of us move forward with all the stuff of every yesterday. Waiting for letters, postcards, signs, that we're still connected.

We are.

Your intuition is your postcard. The letters are always being sent, always in your possession, rewritten anew as each sun emerges; as each experiences fades; as each memory meets its newest moment. Receive the postcard, and receive our loved ones.

In the 3rd chapter of Tractate Berakhot, a full page, which is two sides, is devoted to exploring and trying to answer one question about those we've lost (18a-19b):

ומי ידעי כולי האי?

Do the dead know of this world? Are they aware of the happenings of this earth. The rabbis come to no conclusion. They relentlessly banter the topic from every conceivable angle. They need to know.

And, I know that as I'm saying it, each of you in the room is playing through your mind all the times you've asked the very same question. Are they watching? What if they could see me now? Would I change? Would I want them to see?

We've had these conversations, you and I. They're not easy, but always illuminating.

Because like the Sages of old, the Talmudic rabbis, we too, Jews, won't give up on some kind of eternity--that there is a this world and the next. Not some fantasy land above (like in *The Good Place*, which is amazing), *but a place where love is nestled between souls. Between worlds.* Between us, somehow.

We hold onto the fact that while our loved ones are gone, physically, they never really vanish. Because everything they left inside us, whether we want it or not, whether we asked for it or not, seems to keep writing and sending the postcards we receive when we invoke their memories. or when their memories catch us by surprise.

How could it not be so? That the person who cradled us, cared for us, endured us, taught

us--or, the person we cared for, bathed, changed, held, squeezed.

S/he still sends kisses, or that look, or that hand, or that smile, but now from the place between places, the time beyond time.

This magnificent poem helped me understand something that I had surely known, but couldn't express.

I can let go without letting go. That if I can sometimes let her memory rest and settle, I, too, can rest and be settled. She, in her place, me in mine.

Like me and Ariel on Saturday mornings--sitting quietly together, but still apart.

We're not letting go of each other. We holding one another in the way we are now.