

**August 24th, 2018/13th of Elul, 5778**

Dear chevreh,

I am feeling tender and am in mourning because I lost a beloved person in my life this past Monday evening, Gerald Maritzer. Gerry, or Papa Gerry, was buried yesterday morning outside of Hartford. I delivered the eulogy. It was one of the hardest but most meaningful acts I have ever done. I have known him for over half of my life, and he became a second father to me. In my early to mid-twenties, Marla and I were partners and I was drawn into her extended family. By my late twenties we were no longer a couple, but had transitioned seamlessly into chosen family. Her parents and siblings had accepted me fully and called me daughter and sister. I was the officiant at Marla's wedding to Lisa. I am fortunate beyond belief, but taking on more family means not only more love and responsibilities but more eventual loss. My mother Toni, my father Michael, who died ten years ago and Scott, have all been warmly welcomed into the Maritzer family, as have other close friends of mine. Mama Honey and Papa Gerry truly embody the mitzvah of *hachnasat orachim*, welcoming guests with radical hospitality, into their homes and lives. These past few weeks I got very close up to death and family and what is important. I witnessed and participated in turnings of the heart, apologies, confessions, forgiveness and healing. When we face these transitional moments, life is put into perspective.

We know that during this month of Elul, we are doing a *cheshbon hanefesh*, an accounting of our souls and doing *teshuva*, repenting, returning, perhaps repairing relationships with the living. Another one of the traditions we have during the month of Elul is to visit cemeteries where our relatives are buried. Visiting the graves of family members is meant to bring *kavod*, honor to the one who has died and comfort to us, the living. A 16th century Jewish legalist Moses ben Israel Isserles, taught that we offer prayers at the graves of the departed so that they may intercede on behalf of the living.

We often turn our hearts towards those who have passed at this time of year as we remember them at holiday meals past, or yearn to be with them, or feel the pain at unfinished business or words left unsaid. We go to the cemetery to leave a stone in remembrance, a physical connection where we do not have the previous embodied connection. We go perhaps to see their names etched on the grave, or an inspiring quote or attribute.

Rabbi Debra Cantor reminds us that we do not need to come to the cemetery to remember our loved ones. We can do that anytime and often think of them daily. She writes, "We visit the cemetery to ponder... what will be inscribed on our own tombstones. Not the petty things we mistakenly believe matter so much. Not the disappointments or the hurts or the mistakes. Not the number of things we owned or miles we traveled. And we wonder, as we prepare to enter the Yamim Noraim, the High Holy Days, what will be our epitaph? What will be our legacy? How will we be remembered? We visit the cemetery at this season to set our priorities straight, to remind ourselves about what truly matters, what remains long after we have left this earth: the good we did, the words we shared, the comfort we offered, the relationships we nurtured, the acts of kindness we performed, the times we asked forgiveness, the times we forgave, the love we freely gave and received. To reconnect, to remember and to go forth on our journey towards this

fresh New Year, determined and inspired to live better lives.”

[\[http://www.jewishledger.com/2014/09/visiting-gravesites-during-the-high-...](http://www.jewishledger.com/2014/09/visiting-gravesites-during-the-high-...)

I pray that each of us should find the courage and vulnerability to face what is possible to face this year, within ourselves, with those who are living, and perhaps even -through dreams, prayer, journaling, meditating – with those who are in the next world.

I look forward to seeing some of you at 7:30 pm this evening.

Shabbat shalom, a gutn Shabbes,

Rabbi Diana