

*Give Away Love – Yom Kippur Yizkor 5774  
September 14, 2013 – 10 Tishrei 5774  
Congregation Emanu-El of Westchester  
Rabbi Howard J. Goldsmith*

We often read this beautiful poem before the Mourner's Kaddish:

When I die  
Give what's left of me away  
To children  
And old men that wait to die.  
And if you need to cry,  
Cry for your brother  
Walking the street beside you.  
And when you need me,  
Put your arms  
Around anyone  
And give them  
What you need to give to me.

I want to leave you something,  
Something better  
Than words  
Or sounds.  
Look for me  
In the people I've known  
Or loved,  
And if you cannot give me away,  
At least let me live in your eyes  
And not in your mind.

You can love me most  
By letting  
Hands touch hands,  
And by letting go  
Of children  
That need to be free.  
Love doesn't die,  
People do.  
So, when all that's left of me  
Is love,  
Give me away.

Last night I spoke of theology and philosophy of afterlife, of the myriad ways that our people imagine we go on after we pass from this earth. But this moment, this moment of

Yizkor is not about theories or concepts, it is not about doctrine or systems of thought. Yizkor is about love.

In this moment of memory we strive to find a bit of the love that once held us close and whispered in our ear. We long for a bit of the laugh and kindness that lived in our loved ones eyes. Yizkor is about memory but it is more about love.

Memory is grand but some things fade with time. The insignificant floats away as if it never existed; some important things too, stories from their childhood or the names of their grandparents. Memory is fleeting but love remains. Today we cling to that love. We hope to feel – if only in our minds – that warm embrace though separated by years and worlds.

This poem that we read before Kaddish asks us to give this love away to honor our dead. But not right now, not yet. Right now we try to hold that love close, to feel it in our heart and, if we can imagine it, on our very skin, our lips, in our ears.

We revel in that love in this moment – a love perhaps ideal though probably imperfect; a love shared with many or only with us; a dutiful love or one of the heart and soul. No matter, for Yizkor we yearn for it and when we find it deep within or just under the surface, we fall to tears.

And then we do as our poem suggests. We take the reservoir of love which we have tapped and we begin to give it away. First, ourselves. As Yom Kippur concludes, as the prayer book assures us of God's forgiveness, we finally forgive ourselves, the ultimate act of love. But loving ourselves is not enough, there is more love to give. And so at break fast or over coffee or on the phone or in a note, we spread the waters of love refilled at Yizkor to those who live right now. We give our love to "children and old men that wait to die." We "put our arms around" grandchildren and spouses and our estranged cousin and say, "Life is too short. I need you to know that under the surface, bequeathed to us from my departed loved one, a current of love flows all about."

We come for Yizkor because, "love doesn't die, people do". Since we cannot have our people back, we come to find the love that we shared – a love that keeps on loving. We come to fill our souls with that love until it pours forth as tears from our eyes.

In this hour of sacred memory, may we find the love we seek and may it imbue us with light and with blessing. O God, may we leave Your sanctuary overflowing with that love, giving it away to all we hold dear.

Our memorial service, page 477.