

Tears in Pancakes – Yom Kippur Yizkor 5776
September 23, 2015 – 10 Tishrei 5776
Congregation Emanu-El of Westchester
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The tears started when I stood at the kitchen counter making breakfast. Brook Gladstone from On The Media was just wrapping up a report from the new 9-11 Memorial Museum. I had not yet had my coffee or my breakfast and suddenly tears were falling into the pancake batter. Grief is like that sometimes, just sneaks up on you when you're not really paying attention. I had to sit down and take a few deep breaths. I tried to stop the tears and then I gave in to them, allowing the bottled up emotions to pour out. Some of those feelings came from just beneath the surface: grief for the family who had unexpectedly lost mom a couple days before, grief for my uncle who had died a few months ago, deep feelings for the family who was about to lose their young father to cancer. And some of the feelings came from a deeper place. The struggles of those whose financial fortunes have reversed. The sadness of people wrestling with illness. The many trips I take to cemeteries, walking in the valley of the shadow with those who grieve. The memories of that day fourteen years ago in New York City, images still engraved on my mind, the smell ever present, not far from the tip of my nose.

We cannot live with grief forever. After loss we do the work of grief that we need to do. We cry. We sit. We spend time thinking of our loved ones. We recognize the hole in our lives and we begin, slowly, to fill it. According to tradition the mourning process takes a full year. A full year when celebrations do not feel quite right. A full year of birthdays and anniversaries and holidays and festivals without the company of our dearly departed. And after the year, most of us arrive at a new normal, a new way of being, of living with the void left by our loved one. We turn back to life and seek the many blessings that our world has to offer.

But we never forget. On the anniversary of our loved ones' passings we light candles, affirming the eternal nature of the soul and of memory. We come to synagogue and recite Kaddish at Sabbath services. We have our moment of grief yitgadal vayikadash, shmei rabah. We recite it in the midst of the joy of Shabbat – kids singing prayers, families blessing one another, the smell of coffee and cookies for the oneg in the air – while we have our moment of grief. And then we join back into the flow of life and blessings and eat a cookie or two. And four times each year our tradition calls us to come together as a community to remember our loved ones with Yizkor. Sukkot, Passover, Shavuot and today, Yom Kippur, we stand with our community, with others who know loss, and we recite the words and hear the melodies and have the silence we need to remember. And in this community of grief, we know we're not alone. We walk together through the valley of the shadow of death remembering those we've lost, supporting one another with our very presence. It affirms the words of the Psalmist who promises that God will be with us, as surely as we are with one another.

The butter in the pan was starting to burn like the tears on my cheeks. My children screamed with delight, jumping up and down on the couch in the next room. Brook Gladstone had finished her report and Weekeend Edition Saturday had begun with the events of the day: good and bad. Life flooded back in with all of its challenges and blessings, all of its work and rewards, with the need to brew my coffee and make pancakes for my children. They'd never know that tears fell

into the batter that morning. The syrup would assuage the taste of tears as surely as the sweetness of the next generation provides the promise of blessing even in the face of loss.

May the memories that we hold on to in this service of Yizkor provide us with the sustenance we need to count our blessings, to hug our children, to taste the sweetness of life.