

*Rabbi Jeremy Master*

*Yom Kippur 5782 Yizkor sermon*

## What Is Grief If Not Love Persevering?

One of the most popular television mini-series this year was focused on the effects of grief. In this show, the main character who has lost her parents and her brother is comforted by her partner who asks her “What is grief if not love persevering?” It was fascinating to watch a popular show all about grief, but it worked because the sentiment is so true. If you care deeply about another person, their death is going to hurt. There are philosophies and religious traditions that respond to such pain by calling for an approach of detachment; if you don’t want to feel pain, don’t become attached to anything in this world including other people. Judaism teaches the opposite philosophy, love deeply and be prepared that you will experience the pain of grief because your love perseveres and feel the pain of your loved one’s loss.

In Judaism, love is so integral to our relations with our fellow person. We are to honor our parents and love them even though we will have to see them grow old and watch them die and we are powerless to stop that loss. We love our children more than anything even though it means feeling the pain of their many challenges and suffering. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves because in Judaism this is what it means to be a moral individual. We cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of our fellow person, but must be sensitive to their pain and suffering. We are to feel grief at all signs of suffering in this world because we are supposed to be attached and connected to everyone in this world because our love is real and that love for our family, our friends, our fellow person perseveres.

Judaism then doesn't teach us to detach ourselves from our grief; it teaches us how to cope with our pain and not be broken by it. Each stage of the Jewish mourning process embraces the reality of our grief and provides a ritual process to cope with our sorrow. When death first hits us, traditionally we rend our garments as a symbol of our brokenness in the immediacy of our loss. We are to spend a week focused on mourning, sitting below everyone else, but surrounded by loving friends and family providing us support in our moment of need. Ritually at the end of shiva we return to a semblance of normalcy, but always cognizant that there will be times when the pain of grief wells up within us. Yizkor serves as a prayer of memory on special holidays because it is on these holidays when we feel the pain of missing our loved ones. In the Yizkor prayer we ask God to remember the souls of our loved ones because our love for them perseveres. We continue to feel grief at their loss because we loved them and we hope that because of that love, that their existence is not completely ended but that their souls will persevere for eternity with God who is life eternal. So on this day of repentance when we consider most seriously human frailty and mortality following a year in which we have lost so much and experienced so much grief, let us embrace love and the grief that inevitably will accompany it.