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Yizkor/2013

Yizkor is the only service during the High Holy Days that we attend against our will. None of us wishes to be here because our presence at Yizkor draws us back into our grief, back to confronting a truth sometimes too harsh to bear, that those we loved and needed are gone. And they will not return.

During the rest of the year, we place our laments and our sorrows in a mental lock-box so we can get up each morning and continue to live our lives without them. But then Yizkor arrives, and we enter this sanctuary knowing that our hearts will become heavy, that sadness will again descend on us like a dark cloud. At Yizkor we miss them with the same gripping grief as the day we first said Kaddish for them.

Noted author Nessa Rapoport writes, “Undo it, take it back, make every day the previous one until I am returned to the day before the one that makes you gone. Or set me on an airplane traveling west, crossing the date line again and again, losing this day, then that, until the day of loss still lies ahead, and you are here instead of sorrow.”

I was recently cleaning out a closet and I found the kriyah ribbon I wore during shiva for my mother. It

has been fifteen years, and yet there it was. A small, black rectangular ribbon, torn down the middle. And as if it were yesterday, I remembered being in the room adjacent to the sanctuary that would host her funeral, standing beside my father, near my brother and sister, as the rabbi led us in the prayer, and then came close to me, and tore that ribbon.

There is a wise teaching about Kriyah in the Talmud. The traditional custom was to tear your shirt, or blouse, or jacket, to tear a genuine article of clothing. The Talmud then made provisions for restitching the clothing and restoring it for everyday use after shiva is over. But the Talmud cautions, you may not completely reweave it as new. A remnant of the tear must remain. Sown, but still torn. Restitched, but still a lasting reminder of what has been ripped away from us.

And so it is with grief. There is no denying the waves of pain, of sorrow and even fear we feel when someone we loved has died. Yet our Yizkor prayers will not allow us to stand still in the darkness of our grief. They will ask us to consider the journey of our healing. How, like the garment torn and mended, the torn heart inexorably begins to mend. The way time softens the harsher pain of separation so we can embrace joy again. How family and friends can comfort us when put down the masks meant to convey that we're fine, that we're managing, that we don't want to talk about it, and instead open ourselves

to their caring concern. How the sound of laughter, how each new simcha, how a new baby's smile can revive us, exalt us, and help us heal.

Against Nessa Rapoport's plea, we cannot turn back the clock. The heart cannot be mended as new. They will never again walk beside us. Life will never be as it was. And yet we need to recognize that life also grants joy, love and companionship and meaning.

The psalmist wrote, "You turn my mourning into dancing." We who grieve at this Yizkor hour know the sound of the ribbon's tear.

But time and perspective, God willing, will enable us to dance again. To dance, knowing that something very special of them remains with us, that their strength can still steady our steps, that the values that guided their lives can still inspire us. That memories can break through the darkness and bring a smile.

And finally, that God welcomes their souls into eternity. That each star in a star filled sky reminds us that their souls shine brightly, bound up in God's protective embrace, forever.