

This summer, my favorite baseball team, the Chicago White Sox, or as my childhood Rabbi always called them, that team from the South Side, have been playing great baseball. My father's favorite team was the Cleveland Indians, soon to be the Cleveland Guardians. At the beginning of the season, they were both playing good ball and fighting for that first place spot. I can't tell you how many times I have picked up my phone, looked at my favorites and have wanted to call my Dad. I imagine that I am not alone in feeling that way.

Many of us experienced loss during this past year that was only exacerbated by the pandemic, not allowing us the opportunity to travel for funerals or to have shiva minyans in person. I mentioned to Rabbi Schwartz recently how difficult it was to hear the names on the top part of our Kaddish list, as I had the pleasure and privilege of knowing so many of them. Knowing them is a part of my story as well as the story of Shir Hadash.

Because of Covid, I have not been to Chicago to visit my father's grave. This meant that we held my own father's unveiling over Facetime. This past summer, I officiated at 4 unveilings for members of our congregation. An unveiling traditionally occurs at the 12-month mark, but we have families who hold them anytime between 6 to 12 months after their

loved one has died. The unveiling marks a formal ending to our “year of grieving.”

But this doesn't mean that we stop grieving. As time continues our grief may lessen, but we always remember our loved one. When we get together with family, we share stories of our loved one and maybe it comes up in a conversation with friends. It is these stories that remain a part of us.

And sometimes, those stories may be difficult to hold on to. Perhaps if one had an estranged relationship from the person who died, or maybe your last conversation ended in anger. Maybe that story can be reframed or maybe one can learn how to live with the disappointment or anger associated with that relationship. We have an obligation to remember those that we lost, but acknowledging the relationship we had with that person allows us to be vulnerable and open up ourselves to both the pain and the realities of our relationship with the deceased.

I spoke on Rosh HaShanah about the stories of our lives and how we live our lives today is a model for how we want to be remembered. Our stories are our legacy. And from the moment a loved one dies; we begin to talk about who they were. When you meet with a clergy person, we ask you to share stories about your loved ones. This starts the grieving

process by sharing these memories and stories. These stories can make us laugh and cry, all emotions that are perfectly normal, especially when it comes to grief.

Rabbi Karyn Kedar writes in her book, *Amen: Seeking Presence with Prayer, Poetry, and Mindfulness Practice*:

*Yizkor*. How powerful is the obligation to remember our dead. And how powerful do we become when we sustain moments of vulnerability, when we linger in fragility. How powerful is the human spirit that longs for meaning and purpose. That seeks to touch the edge of the sky. How powerful is the experience of transcendence. And faith? *Yizkor*. My flesh and my heart fail, but God is my heart's strength and my lot forever.

There is little more than this: one precious life where love is legacy and kindness is redemptive and creativity is immortality and memory is sacred.

*Yizkor*.

By allowing ourselves to love, opens us up to all of the ups and downs of relationships. The love we had for someone who died doesn't end with their death. That love is eternal, like our *ner tamid*, our eternal flame, it never ends. Remembering is love, hate, laughter, and tears and

many other emotions that we experience at the moment of loss and that continue in the many years that follow.

Just this past Sunday, I participated in *Kever Avot* for the first time. This takes place at the cemetery where we all gather together for a short service and then visit those graves of people who want to be remembered. Each person had an opportunity to share something about their loved ones and then we sang the *Eil Male*, the memorial prayer for the departed, at the graveside. Hearing these stories brings both a smile to my face and tears to my eyes. Even if I didn't know the person, it is only natural to laugh when a funny story is shared or to cry when a sad moment from their life is presented. This is also why eulogies at funerals are so important for both the mourner and those comforting the mourner. The stories shared with us, connect us and invite us into that family's story. Our sages taught that the path from pain to joy is one that takes work and faith. Sorrow can eventually turn to joy. Joy begins with hope and leads us to the capacity to heal. We go to the cemetery to remember, to remind us of their story. It is not just out of obligation but out of the love that we had for those who have died. Their stories continue to live through us.

As Rabbi Kedar pointed out, memory is sacred. Together here, on this, the holiest of days, we take time to all remember those who came

before us. We hold these memories close to us, we allow them at this moment to envelop us and to feel blessed because they were once a part of our lives. As we remember them.