

We All Count In This Minyan

How privileged we are, that we can gather here this afternoon, all of us, together. How privileged that in this community, each one of us has a place, has a voice. No matter from where each of us has come, no matter our individual backgrounds, whether Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, non affiliated. Whether you are a Jew by birth or a Jew by choice, or someone sharing in the sacred task of creating a Jewish house with his or her partner. We all have a place, a space in this sanctuary, because the values of Reform Judaism are deep and wise, allowing us to share our grief and our pain, and the memories of our loved ones together.

The song I just sang is from an upcoming musical based on a book called "Stars of David", by Abigail Pogrebin. It recounts a true story about the life of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. When I first heard the song I could not help but to focus on the tragedy in her story: the circumstances surrounding her mother's passing, her inability to take part in the mourning rituals being a woman in an orthodox Jewish world. But, perhaps tragedy is a feeling we have all experienced, at least at times, when our lives have been shaken by the loss of beloved friends and family members. I know I have.

About a month before my son was born, and two months before my mother would ultimately pass away after a long battle with cancer, I wrote an email to her. I did not know at the time that it would be the last email I would ever write to her. You see, she and I would speak over FaceTime daily, but lately we had been unable to do so without crying. What follows is a passage from what that email:

"Experiencing your illness and my pregnancy at the same time is something very difficult for us both to handle. There is fear and sadness unsaid...that we won't get to see each other in person again, that Solomon won't get to meet you. It feels so unjust, and at times even tragic. But I've been thinking, and I want us to be able to work through that feeling together, (because:)"

*Tragic is seeing children on the street that don't have enough food on a daily basis.
Tragic is not having the courage to speak up, it is fear that won't allow us to stand up for what is right.
Tragic is not being able to say "Thank you", "I'm sorry", or "I love you",
It is to always see the glass half empty.
Tragic is a marriage without love, support and laughter... parents who give up on their children.
Tragic is not being able to express your emotions, being insensitive to other people's pain, not responding to a cry for help, and not daring to ask for help yourself.
What we are going through is not tragic, Mom, it is...well, life. In its immensity and mystery. It is life which at times transforms into sadness and pain only when it has been well lived, and when the love is intense. A life with real, unconditional love is never tragic..."*

I still read this email to myself, every once in awhile, as a reminder of how immense this task truly is. One much more easily said than done. Easier said than done to not drown in the tragedy and sorrow, and instead to sail in the warm waters of the love, stories, and values that they have gifted us.

On this *Yizkor* we are here to remember. But to remember, *zachor*, has an intrinsically active meaning: we are called to share their stories, spread their love, and live by their example. How lucky we all are to have a community with whom to partner in this most courageous and sacred task, of giving our loved ones eternal life.