

Yom Kippur Yizkor Rabbi Karen Fox
Wilshire Boulevard Temple – Magnin Sanctuary YK at 3pm
September 25, 2011 FINAL

I sat by the Housatonic River in western Mass. and watched the deep pool of water along the riverside. The water seemed to gather from no where. The pool was still in that humid morning air; the pool held itself as if not moving, and then, the water seemed gather, constricting in its small space and finally it found a path, a path into the moving river waters.

Tears are like that. We hold them back against the dam of over-sharing grief, against the expectations that we are ok, against the Hope that sadness will disappear. Tears are held back until the dams of self control and social expectation stream forward. The moments come and the tears join the flow into the river of our lives.

I have no answers for your pain. I won't say "time will heal" or "how old was she?" or "I know how you feel"...because I don't. I wish there was a secret formula to ease aching hearts, to heal broken spirits.

I only know I stand as one of the mourners today—I said I love you and good bye to my Dad six months ago. I held his hands, strong hands even to the end of his life. I see my Dad's short wide hands in my own but his hands were creative, image making hands. I look and yes, I see aspects of my father in my life. And now, both my parents have died, and like you, I am a member of this sacred Yizkor community.

Like all mourners, young and old, I sift through the stories and the years to hold onto the most valuable

memories, the truest images, the eternal messages. We sift through the chaff of life. We select the best of the traits and hold them dear. We notice the difficult characteristics and we try to forgive and let go. We all do that today at Yizkor.

All I can give you today are three words: weep, wait and walk. Three simple words. Weep, wait and walk.

Weep—

Let the tears just stream down, taking memories and images into the path. Remember The Costco aisle where your Dad got the deal on that full case of Dove soap, the JCC where your child raced in swim meets, or this sanctuary where together you walked down this aisle. Memories open the gates of tears again and again.

The tears flow in early morning hours, and in the dark of night. Our tradition understands, saying : “Ba Haerev Yalin Bechi” In the nighttime moments, it is good to cry. Yes, day or night, morning, afternoon, sunset...all good times to cry. No one needs to tell you to hold back now , to cry in private now , to cry at home now . Some cry at weddings and baby namings, others when reviewing photos, most of us cry at death. The crying reveals the broken heart, the lost hopes, the treasured moments, the missing.

For others, not a tear is shed; a numbness takes over, shielding hearts from the pain of the moment. You may long for a tear, a tear that would allow the sadness to emerge from your heart. As our tradition points out “evening comes, and tears dwell back there” –no special time, and no length of time is associated with tears.

WAIT:

We've all heard that phrase "don't make any big decisions" after a death. Don't decide where to move, how to reinvest money, whether to take a new job.

That's obvious. But there is the other waiting –waiting for the fatigue to leave, waiting for the painful images to recede, waiting for the weight on your chest to lighten, waiting for your strength to return.

Each stage of Jewish mourning practice slows us down, and demands that we stay with the moment, and experience the grief. The shiva of a busy week of family and friends, a month of limited social engagements, an eleven months of standing to recite Kaddish, and the Yahrzeit, the markers of yearly memory, remind us to wait, to take healing time, to find renewing time. Our

psalmist calls:—“Wait for God, Strengthen Yourself,
and then wait again for God” (Psalm 27”)

Wait and Take time to find yourself. After the angst of my Dad’s death, after the funeral, the shiva, the initial plunge back into daily work and family responsibilities, I found grief overwhelming. I was in a tunnel at first and it blurred my vision and my imagination. I wrestled with myself, and needed a break. I needed quiet, a quiet I could not find at home. The gurgling river, the flight of eagles, the warm summer rain on my face, the deep gray green of pines and fir trees have eased my ache. Quiet gave me time just to be, moments to rest and restore. The new setting brought understanding, comfort and gratitude. But let me be frank, that grieving ache still comes and goes, after six months and, as you know, after six years, after 16 years and many more.

My third word for you is : **“Walk”**-

I like the early hours, when the light emerges over the hillsides and it is a pinkish yellow glow. Most days, I walk to my local synagogue to say Kaddish,

The walk can be meditative—just a clearing, breathing walk. It can be time for daily memory. On your walk, recall family hikes in the High Sierras, concerts with your wife, the Alaskan fishing trip with your father, or tea on heirloom china with your mother.

Yes, walk again, walk again into the social world.

Walking back into community is challenging. For some, it means walking alone; for others, the caretaking role moved you into the “Land of Sickness” and you almost don’t remember the cues to walking in the world of the healthy.

We have to move forward, but with memory. Do that by developing a memorial Tzedakah project. A bereaved

son created an annual poetry contest in a local library and named it after his mother, the poet. Another Temple family named a series of Jewish ethical textbooks after their beloved son.

Psalms 23 emphasizes walking forward: “Yea, though I walk through the valley overshadowed by death, I am not afraid for You are with me.” When we walk we awake to the changes in the valley overshadowed by death, we know we are not caught in its eternal grasp. We find companionship, of friends who walk with us and of God who guides our steps. We move through changes in the valley overshadowed by death and in time, we experience new vision, new understanding, new gratitude.

All I can offer at this Yizkor moment are three words: **Weep, Wait, Walk**...Simple words, words that are a gift from my heart to yours. May we weep, wait and walk together.

**Zichronam Lvracha. May all our precious memories
be for blessing. Amen, Amen.**