

Yizkor 5767

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David Grossman is one of Israel's leading authors. With his writing, he often examines Jewish – Palestinian relations. His book, The Yellow Wind, is an impassioned account of what Grossman observed on the West Bank in 1987 – not only the misery of the Palestinian refugees and their deep-seated hatred of the Israelis but also the cost of occupation for both occupier and occupied. Like Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua. Grossman fully supported the recent war between Israel and Hezbollah. In the final days, however, as the cease-fire was being negotiated, the three authors presciently urged Israel to pull the soldiers out from Lebanon, rather than risk more lives. Poignantly and tragically Uri Grossman, David and his wife Michal's middle child, died along with 34 other soldiers that last weekend of the war. The words that Grossman spoke at his son's funeral six weeks ago, break open the gates of tears that the *Yizkor* hour invites. This is an excerpt from that eulogy.

“At twenty to three on Saturday night, there was a ring at our door. Over the intercom, they announced themselves as army officers. We had already been through three days when almost every thought that entered our minds began with a negative. He won't come. We won't speak. We won't laugh. There will be no more of that boy with the ironic grin and the crazy sense of humor; No more of that young man with wisdom beyond his years. No more warm smile and no more healthy appetite. No more rare combination of determination and delicateness, no more shrewd common sense and wise-heartedness; No more the infinite gentleness of Uri.

“Uri, my love, throughout all your short life, we have learned from you. We learned from your strength and your determination to go about things your own way. To follow your own path even if there was no chance that you'd succeed.

“You were like this from childhood. A boy who lived in harmony with himself and his surroundings. A boy who knew his place, who knew that he was beloved, and who knew his limitations and his talents. Uri had the courage to be himself all the time and in every situation. He had the courage to find his voice in everything he said and did; this is what saved him from contamination, corruption and diminution of the soul.

“Uri, you were the Left-winger in your regiment, and everyone respected you because you held fast to your word without ever abdicating a single military responsibility. When you left for Lebanon, Ima said that the one thing she was most afraid of was that, if someone were needed to run and save a wounded soldier, you would not hesitate to run directly through the line of fire. And that, just as you were all your life, at home and at school and in your army service, and just as you always volunteered to give up your furloughs because there was someone else who needed a break more than you did; or because someone else's situation was more difficult --- in just this way, would you fall in Lebanon, facing a difficult battle.

“I am not saying anything at this moment about the war in which you were killed. We, your family, have already lost in this war. The State of Israel will make her own reckoning. As your family, we will retreat into our pain, surrounded by our good friends, enveloped in the strong love that we feel from so many people, the majority of whom we don't even know. I am so grateful to them for their boundless support. I only wish that we Israelis could also give this amount of love and solidarity in better times. This is, perhaps, our only common national aspiration. It is our great human resource - if only we knew how to use it. If only we could extricate ourselves from the violence and the enmity that has permeated our way of life.

If only we could know how to save ourselves now, at the last minute, because even more difficult times lie ahead for us.

“In the night between the Sabbath and Sunday morning, at twenty to three, there was a ring at our door. Over the intercom, they announced themselves as army officers, and I went to open the door, and I thought – that's it. Our lives are over. But five hours later, when Michal and I went into Ruti's room and woke her in order to break the terrible news to her, Ruti, after her first cry, said, "But we will still go on living, right? We'll still go hiking like before, and I want to keep singing in the choir, and I want to keep laughing as always, and I want to learn to play the guitar." And we hugged her and told her that yes, we'd still go on living.

“We will take our strength from Uri. He had the strength to carry us forward for many years. He radiated a sense of life, of warmth, and of love. The light of that radiance will continue to shine for us, even if the star itself has been extinguished. Uri our love, it was a great honor for us to live with you. Thank you for every moment that you were ours.

Love – Abba, Ima, Yonatan, and Ruti”

In some sense, I feel I could end here. If your reaction to this *hesped*, is anything like mine was, your face is damp and we've been given the gift of tears. Although we did not know Uri Grossman, each of us carries in our heart the memories of our loved ones whose life and warmth and love filled us for a time. And Uri's death connects us to every death we've ever had to bear.

But, at this hour of *Yizkor*, it seems to me that we need something more. As Grossman assures his daughter, that she and they will go on living, so our presence here now testifies to this truth. For some of you, your mourning period has only just begun. Your parents have died in recent months and you are in the first half of the most intense year of grief. For others of us, our lovers, friends and family members

departed from this world more than a year ago, perhaps, many years ago. It's hard for me to believe that my father will have been dead 30 years on this year's *Yartzheit*. How is that I have survived this many years without his active presence in my life. How is it that we survive?

One thing I've learned is that it is not by withdrawing, by being alone or isolating ourselves. While it is important to have times when we are still and quiet and able to draw upon our own internal strength and resources, alone we are limited. It is when we have others to help us, when we allow them to hold us to witness our tears, to reassure us that our sadness will not swallow us that we can emerge from the darkness. In community, we grow into our changed identity and find our own altered place in the world.

We take comfort from HaMakom, the Place, the Source, the Presence, the Eternal. As May Sarton observes in her *Journal, Recovery*, "No two loves are alike, no two deaths, and no two losses: these are paths we travel alone." And yet, as unique as our sorrow is, once we have known such sorrow, we can both provide solace and draw solace from others who have survived such losses. Sorrow is our common lot with humanity.

At this hour of Yizkor, we come for ourselves as much as to support one another in this *minyán* of mourners, our Sha'ar Zahav family.

One of the jewels I treasure as a parent is learning how to accept, honor, witness my daughter's sadness and tears. Whether it's over spilt milk or a lost balloon, My first instinct in trying to comfort her is to stop her from crying. And yet, over and over again, I see that what she really needs is for me to be patient, to help her feel her feelings and cry her truth... for as long as she needs to. This came to me most clearly when, I once tried prematurely to wipe her tears away, "No, Ima! Stop! I want to wear my tears!"

Oh, how I wish there had been someone in my childhood, who could have encouraged me to wear my tears. A cousin? A teacher? A friend?

Thank goodness, thank God, for our extended family here at CSZ. I have been so uplifted by the many who come to help make *shiva* and *shloshim minyans*. I am consoled by those, who volunteer to visit the sick, to bring food, to make cards and calls and reach out to fellow members, even when they have never met them, simply because, we share this common ground. If you want to make a profound difference in someone's life, show up to someone's home to comfort them when they're bereaved. It is a mitzvah that they will always remember.

Perhaps the ultimate *mitzvot* are those acts of caring for the dead, *hesed shel emet*. A little more than 7 weeks ago, one of our congregants, Mavis Eldredge died. Mavis, the mother of our devoted member, Joss Eldredge, died on August 4th, when I was in Israel with our congregational mission. While away, Reuben, our Rabbinic Intern and a group of members helped Joss and her partner Sandra, fulfill the sacred tasks of caring for the dead. Together they formed a *Chevra Kaddisha*, a holy friendship circle to assist in *kavod ha-met*, including the Jewish preparations of *tahara*, the ritual washing and dressing of the body before burial.

Tahara is an ancient ceremony not often practiced by Reform Jews. In hearing from those, who had the profound privilege and honor of helping Mavis, and her family, it is clear that the ceremony was uniquely healing and transformational. In listening to the details, and I encourage each of you to learn more about the details, I came to see that we ought to create this opportunity for others – both to give and when the time comes, to receive the tenderness of *tahara* performed by the holy circle of our extended family, Sha'ar Zahav. It is a godsend to be part of this exquisite community.

Rabbi George B. Lieberman once related dark periods of life to the cycle of life, a cycle that includes joy as well as sadness:

“... where there is life, there is pain, for there can be no life without pain. Where there is pain, there is love. Where there is love, there is healing. Where there is healing, there is hope; and where there is hope, there is life.

Yes, we will go on living. Even in his saddest hour, David Grossman knew that he and his family would go on living. He knew that the strength and support that they would draw upon from their community would be the bedrock of their survival. And so may we go on living holding the memories and the love we have for those who have departed keeping them present in our lives.

And with our lives we will strive to live in such a way as to bring blessing to the very ones whose memory blesses us. May this be God’s will, Amen.