

April 2019



“Dealing With Death, Despair, Pain and Bumps in The Road??”

The death of a close friend, a dear sibling or coworker, or close friend can lead a person to great depths of grief, despair and hurt. There are times when the death seems like a blessing because the person was suffering from an illness or some other misfortune, and they are now free from their suffering. In some instances, the individual expires because of old age or in other occasions, the passing of an individual is sudden and shocking. Regardless, when someone a person knows passes from this life, there is usually a time of great sorrow and pain.

Over the course of this past year, we have had the unfortunate experience of knowing some family , friends, partners or coworkers of ours who either died suddenly or have been going through the dark valleys of their lives. I was standing in the waiting room of a hospital with the family of one of our members "Jimmy" that was diagnosed with a bad terminal illness. Jimmy's co-worker came over to me, hands me a piece of paper and says " I came across the following story a while back that was written by an older gentleman, Rabbi please pass it along to our troops". The elderly gentleman had written his response to someone who had asked the following question in an editorial in his newspaper: "My friend just died. I don't know what to do, I feel overwhelmed by grief and pain". Many people responded, but there was one elderly man whose incredible comments stood out from the rest. What he stated might just change the way we approach life, death grief and pain, and this is what he wrote.

“Alright, here goes. I'm old. What that means is that I've survived (so far) and a lot of people I've known and loved did not. I've lost friends, best friends, acquaintances, co-workers, grandparents, parents, relatives, teachers, mentors, students, neighbors, and a host of other folks. I have no children, and I can't imagine the pain it must be to lose a child. But here's my two cents.

I wish that I could say that you get used to people dying. I never did. I don't want to. It tears a hole through me whenever someone I love dies, no matter the circumstances. But I don't want it to “not matter.” I don't want it to be something that just passes. My scars are a testament to the love and the relationship that I had for and with that person. And if that scar is deep, so was the love. So be it. Scars are a testament to life. Scars are a testament that we can love deeply and live deeply and be cut, or even gouged, and that we can heal and continue to live and love. And scar tissue is stronger than the original flesh ever was. Scars are a testament to life. Scars are only ugly to people who

can't see the story behind them.

“As for grief, you'll find that it comes in waves. When the ship is first wrecked, you're drowning, with all of the wreckage around you. Everything floating around you reminds you of the beauty and the magnificence of the ship that was...and is no more. All you can do is float. You find some piece of wreckage and hang on for a while. Maybe it is a physical thing. Maybe it is a happy memory or a photograph. Maybe it's a person who is also floating. For a while, all you can do is float and stay alive.

“In the beginning, the waves are 100 feet tall and crash over you without mercy. They come 10 seconds apart and don't even give you time to catch your breath. All you can do is hang on and float. After a while, maybe weeks, maybe months, you'll find the waves are still 100 feet tall, but they come further apart. When they come, they crash over you and wipe you out. But in between, you can breathe, you can function. You never know what's going to trigger the grief. It might be a song, a picture, a street intersection, the smell of a cup of coffee. It can be just about anything...and the wave keeps crashing...but in between waves...there is life.

“Somewhere down the line, and it is different for everybody, you find that the waves are only 80 feet tall...or 50 feet tall. And while they still come, they come further apart. You can see them coming. An anniversary, a birthday, or the Holidays, or landing at an airport. You can see it coming and for the most part, you prepare yourself. And when it washes over you, you know that somehow you will, again, come out the other side. Soaking wet, sputtering, still hanging on to some tiny piece of the wreckage, but you'll come out.

“Take it from an old guy. The waves never stop coming, and somehow you don't really want them to. But you learn that you'll survive them. And other waves will come...and you will survive them too. If you're lucky, you'll have lots of scars from lots of love...and lots of shipwrecks that somehow you survived.”

It is my deepest hope and prayer that this commentary can help you or someone you know who may be “drowning” in a Sea of Despair or Grief. I know this...it helped me when I read it a while ago when my lifelong and best friend got ill and died, and who I miss every day...my Dad. So's here to hope, grace, and happiness...and remembering the times with your loved one...the memories that will last a lifetime! And most important of all, should you know of someone struggling with a loss or going through hard times, reach out to them with a call or a hug let them know they are not alone and that they are

being prayed for. Because in life, there are those moments, that there are no words, and the greatest comfort that one can give another, is your mere presence, a hug and a prayer.....end of note. I was sitting in my car outside the Hospital reading the note, trying to control my emotions, and I realized sometimes a good cry is the best balm for the soul. It brought to mind the famous line "Every day of life is a gift, enjoy your present!" .

And here are a few thoughts to keep your heart smiling

Read and try to understand the deeper meaning of them.

- 1). Prayer is not a "spare wheel" that you pull out when in trouble, but it is a "steering wheel" that directs the right path throughout life.
- 2). Why is a car's windshield so large & the rear view mirror so small? Because our past is not as important as our future. So, look ahead and move on.
- 3). Friendship is like a book. It takes a few seconds to burn, but it takes years to write.
- 4). All things in life are temporary. If they are going well, enjoy them, they will not last forever. If they are going wrong, don't worry, they can't last that long either.
- 5). Often when we lose hope and think this is the end, G-d smiles from above and says, "Relax, sweetheart; it's just a bend, not the end!"
- 6). When G-d solves your problems you have faith in His abilities; when G-d doesn't solve your problems, He has faith in YOUR abilities.
- 7). A blind person asked G-d: "Can there be anything worse than losing ones eye sight?" He replied: "Yes, losing your visions!"
- 8). When you pray for others, G-d listens to you and blesses them, and sometimes, when you are safe and happy, remember that someone has prayed for you.
- 9). Worrying does not take away tomorrow's troubles; it takes away today's peace.
- 10) (My favorite line.)Never let a day go by without having a good laugh, even if you have to look in the mirror.

On behalf of ALL the Chaplains, May G-d bless you and keep you safe.

Should you need a shoulder to lean on or an ear to listen, don't hesitate to give us a call.

Best of blessings to you and your families, for a Happy and healthy Passover and Easter Holidays.

Compliments of your Chaplain, Rabbi Moshe Wolf

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