

Since the attacks of 9/11 we have had to face the fact that there is real hate in this world, and that terror is not something that stalks those only in distant lands. Even now, two years after that awful day, we are faced with painful questions: how do we make sense of what took place? Where was God? Can we affirm life in the face of those who glorify death?

These are, of course, the very questions raised whenever we confront death. Most of us do not have to face the agony of having our loved ones perish so tragically, but there is no one at this sacred hour who has not known the suffering that comes when someone you care about dies.

For some, there is the sorrow of children lost. Dreams unrealized. Hopes dashed. The world's natural order turned upside down. How see the joy of life, when one so young has that gift snatched away? And what of those who lose a partner, spouse, sibling or friend at the prime of their lives? The pain comes decades earlier than expected. "He was too young to go," we rail, "There is so much she had left to do." But sorrow is not limited to those of tender or middle years. Where love has a hold, anguish is rarely far away. Does it matter that someone you loved died at the age of 83 when their laughter still brought you joy, their sage advice still helped you achieve balance, their stories of a century ago gave you roots?

This moment of remembrance is, in part, meant to counter the emptiness and sorrow death leaves in its wake. By recalling people we cared about, we find that not everything about them is lost. Prayers and recollections alone, however, are only a beginning. They help us take from what was and give meaning to what is. It is when our lives change that, in essence, something of our deceased loved ones live again. It may sound trite, but the one thing that conquers death is love in the here and now.

The novelist, Ian McEwan, wrote the following about one woman's love at the moment of terror in New York:

A San Francisco husband slept through his wife's call from the World Trade Centre. The tower was burning around her, and she was speaking on her mobile phone. She left her last message to him on the answering machine. A TV station played it to us, while it showed the husband standing there listening. Somehow, he was able to bear hearing it again. We heard her tell him through her sobbing that there was no escape for her. The building was

on fire and there was no way down the stairs. She was calling to say goodbye. There was really only one thing for her to say, those three words that all the terrible art, the worst pop songs and movies, the most seductive lies, can somehow never cheapen. I love you.

She said it over and again before the line went dead. And that is what they were all saying down their phones, from the hijacked planes and the burning towers. There is only love, and then oblivion. Love was all they had to set against the hatred of their murderers.

Hundreds of people were able to make phone calls to their loved ones as they sat on one of the doomed planes, or as the smoke billowed from below in the World Trade Centre. They all, essentially, said the same thing. "I love you." "I want you to always be happy." "Please say good-bye to our daughter." "Mommy, I want you to know I love you," by a 30-year-old woman. In a television interview Rabbi Irwin Cula said that these final, loving words are sacred texts, for they speak the essence of someone's deepest concerns at the moment when he or she is faced with life and death. They are "the real Torah, the real wisdom, the real religious tradition, the real experience behind religion." And, at that moment of confronting death, the only thing that really matters is love.

Time and again when people I meet after a loved one's death tell me how lucky they feel if they had the chance to say to the deceased, "I love you." And when a dying person can utter these simple words the mourners find their pain is lessened. "I love you." They are sacred words, for they teach that what is most relevant about our lives is the connection we make with others. At the end of the day, that is what Yom Kippur is all about - getting the connections right - with God, with other people, with ourself. That is at the very foundation of Judaism. Acceptance. Understanding. Forgiveness. Love.

Because he saw these words a living Torah, Rabbi Cula felt he had to do something more with them than simply read them. He decided to chant them. He explained that his father was a cantor. At an early age, he learned that singing was not only for times of joy, but was also an expression of grief. We sing dirges to mourn the fall of the Temple and sad laments at funerals. Why not, he thought, use the tearful chant for these final words of those lost on 9/11. Let us listen, then, to new words of Torah.

**[Singing]:**

"Honey. Something terrible is happening. I don't think I'm going to make it. I love you. Take care of the children."

"Hey, Jules. It's Brian. I'm on the plane and it's hijacked and it doesn't look good. I just wanted to let you know that I love you, and I hope to see you again. If I don't, please have fun in life, and live life the best you can. Know that I love you, and no matter what, I'll see you again."

"Mommy. The building is on fire. There's smoke coming through the walls. I can't breathe. I love you, Mommy. Good-bye."

We never knew the people who uttered these words. Yet their words touch our hearts, for they are expressions of that great truth we come here to express during this *Yizkor*.

Love is stronger than death. And the loving words we say to our friends and dear ones remind us of the sacred possibility of what we say. Torah is not only what is in the Ark. Torah is the connections you make. So take that Torah with you. Remember those you love ... and honor that emotion by loving the here and now even more. Yes, it is painful to remember and to have our loved ones with us no more. But there are so many more you can love. So, say the words. Act upon your most noble emotions. Love ... and be Torah.