

Each and every time Kaddish is recited, I stand. I may not know a soul whose Yahrzeit falls on that day. But somehow in the mystical way the world works- someone who touched my life, touched someone else's life as well, all the way back to one who needs Kaddish said. I rise as well for all those who have no one left to remember them. Entire families who perished in the Shoah. I stand for the names of lists in Yad VaShem or at Israel's memorials. I stand for those who lost their lives fighting this country. Mostly though, in a greater way, I stand for myself. Because if I remember Marilyn and Stuart and Kenneth, than I pray that someone will remember me.

I had a very minor surgery last year- the anesthesia did not scare me, the pain did not scare me, the procedure did not scare me. But when I imagined something going wrong and my three beautiful children not remembering the feel of my heart beat, my hands caressing their heads, my voice singing in their ear ... that terrified me.

Sometimes, I have the dream that I am dead. It's a bit morbid and I think it comes from officiating at burials. I see my funeral, my loved ones grieving. Like the film *Ot's a Wonderful life*, I can see my family, but they cannot see me. And loudly as I try to scream that I am still alive, the sadness chokes me into silence. I jerk back into the present reality and try to make the next moments more meaningful, but sometimes the sadness is sustained.

It's a crazy dream, and yet I have had more than once in my life. I have never suffered through a potentially terminal illness but as a rabbi, I know that death can claim us at any time and in any situation. So I imagine the world without me, and that is not what makes me so sad- the world would just be the world without me. I am not presumptuous to think that my life is essential to eternity. It's all that I would miss being

in the world. I would miss being a wife and a mother, a daughter, a rabbi and a friend. I would miss you.

On Rosh Hashanah, I began a conversation with my three children in the form of an ethical will. They do not understand the words yet, but I pray that I live to see my words and actions impact Bailey, Jackie and Sophie and the people they will become. I pray that God grants us all long lives, but I know that is not always the case.

Yom Kippur is a rehearsal for our own deaths. We wear white, the color of purity and innocence- the color that traditional Jews are buried in. We forgo earthly pleasures such as food and water, showering and sex. Our feet are enclosed in fabric rather than leather and we recite the Vidui- the confessional that we say right before we die. By the end of Ne'ilah, when the darkness covers the earth, we are meant to look like corpses- as if we are already in the Olam HaBa, the world to come.

To me there is something both comforting and terrifying about this ritual. The terrifying part is obvious- who wants to die before they are ready? And for the most part, is anyone every ready. But it's the comforting part that surprises me.

Today we stand shoulder to shoulder as a community, reciting our ancient liturgy in one voice, facing what will be our inevitable end. Yet the words that we recite, remind us to live, to seek and find peace with the time that we have on earth. Each of us will die- and each of us will leave those who remember us- our words, our teachings, our acts. Preparing for death is truly living.

Rabbi Rami Shapiro, one of the poetic liturgists of our time, does not wear a watch. Rabbi Yael Ridberg explains that he stopped wearing one when he read about how overly time-conscious people can drive themselves into an early grave. With the patent

pending on the "Life expectancy timepiece", Rabbi Shapiro has reconsidered a timepiece. The watch has a chip where all your physical data is read and then begins to count down until the big zero. Imagine, he says, walking down the street and someone asks you the time- "well, I have 30 years, 119 days, 19 hours, four minutes and 20 seconds left. It's certainly more interesting than saying 3:30.

The effect of such a timepiece would be obvious. It would focus us on living the way that we want to live, that we need to live. It would have the potential of allowing us to focus on the good and positive in people rather than their pettiness and our jealousy. We would truly live in the present, experiencing time as it comes. But in the absence of a: life expectancy timepiece, we have to do the work ourselves.

In a few minutes we will rise for the Yizkor prayer? How many of us will shed tears of sweet remembrance? How many will shed tears for loved ones who left too soon? How many of us will be unable to cry- still resentful at words left unsaid- still disappointed in the potential for relationships unfulfilled. How many of our tears will be for our own mortality? Vulnerable to the reality of our end. Will we live a good life? Will we be remembered for righteousness? Will our children, will our friends remember us with love or with bitterness? Will anyone say Kaddish for us?

Rabbi Marshall Meyer, may his memory be for a blessing, taught that if "life inexorably ends in death, what is the meaning of life? If before we are born we are nothing and if death returns us to nothing, what is life? What does it mean to be human?" This moment before we utter the Yizkor prayer shakes us to our souls. What is life in the face of death and memory?

A *midrash* tells of the time of Moses' passing. He struggled against God's edict that he would not be able to enter the land of his ancestors with the people. God heard Moses' prayer and said, "I have heard your words. I myself shall attend to you, and bury you. And when Moses beheld the glory of the Holy One, he fell upon his face and said, "In love you have created the world, and in love you have guided it. Treat me also with love and deliver me not into the hands of the angel of death." And the heavenly voice sounded and said, "Moses be not afraid. Your righteousness will go before you and the glory of God will be your reward. God kissed Moses on the mouth, gently stealing his breath. God then wept for Moses and mourned him. (Midrash Rabbah Devarim)

We who live cannot know the day of our death. After we prepare through written wills, ethical wills, and medical papers, then we live and love and learn how to make a difference in the world and in other's souls. It is not possible to conquer death, but it is possible to create memories and love that survives us.

May we take a moment to remember the faces of those we have loved and lost. May we try to remember the sound of their laughter, the softness of their skin. May we remember all we have forgotten about them, and all we have forgotten about ourselves.

Zecher Tzaddik Livracha- the memory of the righteous is a blessing. Hayyim Tzaddik Livracha- the life of a righteous soul is a blessing. May we all be remembered by future generations. May our names be theirs and our legacy remain alive.