

Tear Soup*
Yizkor 5777

Over the years, I've asked you some difficult questions. I've asked you to wrestle and struggle with some of the most complex of emotions. And, today, at this sacred hour, I want to ask you perhaps the most painful question of all: "How many times in your life have you really grieved?"

I know that people in your life have died and you have felt sad, or angry, or confused. But it didn't take long -- a few days, or at most a week -- and you were back to normal, absorbed in your regular tasks and enjoyments. You might not have admitted it to anyone, even yourself, but you coped, you went on, you were okay.

I've asked a lot of people this question, in the privacy of personal conversations, and every person has been amazingly honest and quite able to answer, without prompting, differentiating immediately between sadness and real grief.

Here is what I call real grief: even years later, you find yourself staring at the wall or out the window and you don't even know where you are or what you're doing. It's a deep, wrenching, all-consuming grief: you're crying and you don't even know it; you look at photographs with a lump in your throat; years after their deaths, you look at everyone sitting at the Passover Seder table and all you want in the world is for that loved one to be there for just for one night, even if it means they'd criticize the *matzoh* balls for being too light or too heavy.

Maybe you've never had that kind of mourning; and, if not, you've been lucky.

But if you have had one or two or a few times in your life when you were destroyed by a person's death, then I want to tell you a story from a book called: *Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss* by Pat Schwiebert and Chuck DeKlyen. Here is the story:

There was an older woman named Grandy. A child of one of Grandy's friends, whom she loved very much, died. There was only one thing Grandy could muster the will and strength to do and that was to make a pot of Tear Soup. For many years, the custom of making tear soup had been forgotten. People found that it was easier to just take a can from the shelf and heat it up, but Grandy had no other choice than to start from scratch and figure out the recipe on her own . . . over time.

Grandy went home and pulled out a big pot, big enough for all of the memories, all the misgivings, all the feelings and all the tears she needed to stew in the pot. You see -- grief takes longer to cook than anyone thinks it will.

She put on her apron because she knew it would get messy. Grief is never clean.

And then Grandy started to cry. She sobbed. She wept quietly; and sometimes, when she was alone in her car and no one could hear her, she wailed. She needed to make the Tear Soup by herself. People have a hard time seeing tears.

But when she tasted a sip of the broth, all she could taste was salt from her teardrops. It tasted bitter. Some of the memories she stirred in were bad and sad, but some of them were good or even silly.

Over time, she stirred in all the different memories into the pot. But then she

ran out of things to add; had she run out of memories? This feeling was worst of all. She felt cold and empty; the pain she was feeling was indescribable.

What was really strange to her was that, when she looked out the window, she was surprised to see how the rest of the world was going on as usual . . . while her world had stopped.

Grandy had friends who meant well, but in a way they were afraid of her; they didn't know what to say. Sometimes she would ask people, "Care to join me in a bowl of Tear Soup?" But they wouldn't want to go near it. People who passed her house would smell the aroma of Tear Soup, and just keep going hurrying past her door. At most, a few people could manage a *cup* of Tear Soup. Only a few of her closest friends could join her in a whole bowl.

There was a friend name Midge who admitted that she didn't know what to say, but was glad that Grandy had made such a big pot of soup. Grandy said to her: "I feel like I'm unraveling. I'm going crazy, so I can't make any decisions. Nobody can make me feel better. I'm a mess. I just didn't realize that it would be this hard."

Midge said they should go for a walk. Grandy knew that exercise was good for her, but she felt like she had concrete blocks strapped to her legs.

Grandy kept praying even though she was angry at God. She realized that while some people think that faith can spare you from sorrow and loneliness, she was grateful for all the emotions that God had given her.

People would ask her: "Is it soup yet?"

Or they would say: "It's time to get out of the kitchen." She knew they meant well, but they just didn't get it.

One of the hardest moments is when you decide that it's okay not to eat Tear Soup all the time.

But she also realized that you're never really finished eating it.

That's the book *Tear Soup*.

#

In truth, there are a lot of tears in life. We cry from grief, like in this book, and we cry from joy. As Jews we know this. That is why we come together to say *Yizkor*, so that we will all feel safe enough, especially during this Memorial Service, to taste our Tear Soup embraced and loved by a community of mourners who understand our pain.

To those of you who have been there, who can relate to the idea of Tear Soup, of major grief, I want to say something that may sound strange: *Yasher Koach*.

In case you're not familiar with this phrase, let me explain. When you participate in a service, chant the Torah blessings for an *aliyah*, or open the Ark, you may find people are sticking their hands out to you and saying "*Yasher Koach!*" with great enthusiasm.

Without going into the proper pronunciation and grammar, I will tell you that, in traditional synagogues, this custom has really taken hold in daily, Shabbat, or holiday services, where if you receive any honor at all, you have to shake the hand of every person in the room. They're congratulating you on a job well done.

The word *Yasher* comes from the Hebrew word *ishur*, which means to "approve" or "sanction," and *koach*, which means strength. "*Yasher koach!*" translates, literally, "May your strength be firm!" But it is used as an idiom, meaning,

"More power to you," or "Good job!" It carries with it the hope that this *mitzvah* will give you the strength to move on to future *mitzvot*. I'll just mention that the polite thing to say in return is "*Baruch Tihiye*" which means "blessed you will be," which might translate as, "Back at you!"

I am discussing *Yasher Koach* because this is the strange and weird thing that I want to say to those of you who know what Tear Soup is.

Yasher koach, because somehow, despite the dreams and nightmares you had during the night, or despite the fact that you didn't sleep at all, you get up in the morning. Somehow, despite a grief that never goes away, you go to work or go out to lunch with friends and you smile . . . even when they're talking about nonsense.

Somehow, despite a pain that always, always hurts, you go on with your life.

And that's one of the reasons why I want to say *Yasher Koach*, May you be strengthened. May G-d help you to keep going.

But mostly I want to say *Yasher Koach* because you loved someone so much, so intensely, so deeply, that the person's death wrecked you. As they say, "when all is said and done, grief is the price we pay for love."

If you are still in grief, years later, it means that you are a real human being, a human being with depth and levels and a real heart.

Yasher koach that you have loved so much that you are decimated.

Do you remember that Tina Turner song, "What good's a heart, if your heart can get broken?" I would put it very differently: Your heart can't be broken unless you have one. What's love got to do with it? Everything.

So if you still mourn, *Yasher Koach*.

So here we are at *Yizkor*, at our Memorial Service, and we remember a lot of people who have passed away. But mostly, we think about the one or two or three people who we miss all the time, those special souls for whom we eat Tear Soup . . . even on a fast day.

The terrible truth, of course, is that they died, and often we have horrible memories of the way they left us; or when they passed; or why it happened; or how they suffered.

But the profound certainty is, that if you are someone who is eating Tear Soup today, you have really lived. Amen.

* I am grateful to Rabbi Benjamin E. Scolnic, of Temple Beth Sholom in Hamden, CT, for his sermon: "*Yasher Koach and Tear Soup*," *Yom Kippur* 5776.