

Live Now, Love Again  
 Rabbi Rosalin Mandelberg  
 Ohef Sholom Temple  
 Yizkor 5780/October 9, 2019

On May 3, 2017, author and filmmaker Amy Krouse Rosenthal wrote a piece for the *New York Times* "Modern Love" column. You might remember it because it was called, "You may want to marry my husband." You see, just two years earlier, Amy wasn't feeling well. A trip to the doctor revealed the worst; she had ovarian cancer.

Over the next two years, Amy fought hard for life, along with her husband of 26 years, Jason, and her three teen-age and young adult children Justin, Miles, and Paris. But despite the best efforts of her physicians, her family and herself, she was losing the battle. That's when she did the one thing she could always rely on to get her through good times and bad: she took up her pen and began writing.

"You may want to marry my husband," she wrote. First of all, he is incredibly handsome, super fit, and a very sharp dresser. But it's his kind face and beautiful hazel eyes I will miss looking at more than I can say. He is also talented, a wonderful artist and a lover of music; how many teenage kids do you know who would rather see a concert with their dad than with any of their friends? He's a great cook and he's unbelievably handy (I swear he really is Jewish).

Most important of all, he is an incredible father and husband. How many men do you know who bring flowers to a first pregnancy ultrasound appointment? Jason did. "If he sounds like a prince . . . it's not too far off."

And although she's never been on a dating site, she quips: "My guess is you know enough about him now. So let's swipe right," which is what you do when you are interested in meeting someone on one of those apps.

During the remainder of the column, Amy doesn't complain about her situation or feel sorry for herself. Her only lament is that her time on earth is too limited. She writes: "I want more time with Jason. I want more time with my children. I want more time sipping martinis at the Green Mill Jazz Club on Thursday nights." Knowing that cannot be, Amy explains that she is writing in the hope that "the right person reads this, finds Jason, and another love story begins." She concludes, "I'll leave this intentional empty space below, as a way of giving you two the fresh start you deserve."

Then on March 13th, just ten days after her column was published, Amy Krouse Rosenthal died. She was 51.

Jason Rosenthal was devastated. By nature, he was a more reserved guy, content to love and support his family through his law practice and hands on involvement and to let Amy have the limelight. But after her passing, he felt compelled to share his experience with other mourners and even with those who hadn't known great loss. "I am really sad a lot of the time," he reported . . . yet, "the great irony of my life is that it took losing my wife of 26 years, my best friend, and the mother of my three children, to truly appreciate each moment and each day." His purpose now, he says, is to share Amy's gift to him with everyone who has lost a loved one and is coping with grief -- you have permission to live now and to love again.

###

Amy and Jason's story is obviously very compelling, and poignant, and tragic; yet it is also, to reiterate a phrase I used on *Erev Rosh Hashanah*, an amazing example of "beauty hunting." So in their powerful and sad saga, I believe there are several lessons for us to contemplate during this time of of our most heartfelt remembering - *Yizkor*.

First and foremost, Jason reflects that losing Amy made him "truly appreciate each moment and each day." Indeed, life is a gift. It is not always easy; no one said it would be. We all confront our share of challenges, setbacks and losses, highs and lows, joys and sorrows. And when we face the hard times, as we inevitably do, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that despite them, life is a precious gift, for which we should be grateful. It is so easy to fall into the trap of taking these precious things for granted. This time and place remind us that we shouldn't, and that we are enjoined by our Jewish values, in Jason's words, to "truly appreciate each moment and each day." Indeed, that is what Amy most wanted for Jason to go on living and loving and that is what your loved ones most wish for you - that you dare to live and love again.

Second, Amy was a prolific writer and filmmaker, publishing over 30 children's and adult books, many of which were *New York Times* bestsellers. In addition, she had many other creative pursuits, one of which was a video project that she started in 2008 that invited viewers to join her "to make one more thing." She set a gathering place and time at a local park on a summer afternoon where she expected maybe 30 people would come; over 400 showed up.

For their "one more thing," one group of strangers stood together in a line and flipped over sheets of paper that read "Make. the. most. of. your. time. here." A simple, yet critically important message because so often many of us waste much of our allotted time. An essential teaching of *Yom Kippur* is that life is short, time is precious, and we must cherish it, use it wisely, and make the most of it. We shouldn't wait to do the things of which we dream. We ought not postpone joy. We certainly shouldn't delay reaching out to a loved one or a friend, whether things between us are good or not. "We never know when our last day may be," our liturgy proclaims, "so we ought to live each day as if it were our last" meaning as fully as possible.

Amy Krouse Rosenthal certainly seems to have made the most of her time. She was an incredible wife and mother. She shared her gifts of writing and creativity with thousands and thousands of people. While Amy's years were cut tragically short, she filled them with life that enriched her family and countless others. Her tragedy reminds us that we ought to strive to work on ourselves and do deeds of compassion and justice every day, to make ourselves and the world around us just a little better.

These High Holidays compel us to ask ourselves some hard questions, among them: did I make the most of my gift of time this past year? How much time did I waste? How will I make better use of my life and my time in the coming year so that I better others and the world? Honestly, wouldn't your beloved, whom you remember in this hour, want that of and for you as well?

Finally, the greatest lesson of the Rosenthal's story may be the blank space that Amy left at the end of her essay, space for Jason and his new love "to get the fresh start they deserve." Each of us has our own blank space to fill. Our blank space is our *Book of Life*, our *Sefer Hayim*; it is the days, the years, and God-willing, the decades we have ahead. What will we write in that space? How will we fill it? Will we honor those loved ones we

recall at this hour by living our lives with goodness and generosity? For this is how we appreciate them most of all—by embodying the values they modelled for us through our own words and deeds. Here and now we remember loved ones who have gone to their eternal home.

But we will do much more to cherish their memories by what we do and how we conduct ourselves each and every day, with what we write in our blank space, in our Book of Life. It is how we choose to live after the Gates of Repentance have been closed and we leave this sacred place and go out into the real world that will truly reflect their impact upon us and the world.

###

A Postscript: You may be wondering what kind of responses Jason Rosenthal received to Amy's personal ad for him? Not surprisingly, there were many. He got quite a range of messages—some were overly forward. Others were funny, wise, moving, or sincere. He describes one response from the child of a single mother who wrote: "I'd like to submit an application for my mom, like friends and family can do for participants on 'The Bachelor.'" Imagine: a real-life "Sleepless in Seattle!" Jason found solace, and even laughter, in many of the responses; they truly helped him with his grieving. But what helped him the most are living out the values his Amy, his wife and best friend, taught him.

So to honor her memory, Jason Rosenthal asks himself, and we must ask ourselves: "What will we do with the blank space on our paper? With our fresh start?" In other words, how will we live our lives going forward? Will we live with gratitude for the gifts we have been given?

Will we use our time wisely? Will we strive to make the lives of those around us better? Will we live lives of integrity, honesty, kindness and love? Will we treat each other with compassion, understanding and dignity?

These are *Yom Kippur* questions, but they are meant to be taken with us beyond this sanctuary, beyond this service, and beyond this day, into our homes and our neighborhoods and our workplaces, into our hearts, and, most of all, into our words and deeds. Your loved ones whom you now remember would want nothing less than that you live now and love well. So let us begin. Amen.