

## Time Will Tell Where Love Goes

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“Time will tell where love goes when one of its most radiant sources is ungraciously taken. Yet so many lean forward to give cover along the way.”

These words were written in March 2009, shortly after Rabbi Billy Dreskin buried his 19-year-old son Jonah. As he says, “It was a devastating experience to let go of my child. And yet, the loving hands that kept me from falling into a spiritual grave of my own have shaped my life every day since.”

Jonah had been a freshman at the University at Buffalo. He had just completed his midterms and was planning a drive home with his sister Katie. Fate intervened and, instead of coming home, Jonah died. There were no goodbyes. No time for final blessings. One day Jonah was here, the next he was gone. Jonah was my camper who loved to play guitar. He was a good one...

If we are loved, then when we die – early or late – people grieve for us. Those whom we have loved, we miss them and our hearts yearn to have them back.

We never got a chance to say goodbye to Jonah. For those who have been deprived of a farewell, whose loved ones are gone long before we thought possible, the return to “normal living” can be an especially difficult journey.

“Yet so many lean forward to give cover along the way.”

After you lose someone or something you love, there is usually an emptiness you feel inside. You may think the empty space will never be filled; you may feel as if there is a hole in your heart that will remain forever. The death of a loved one, the loss of a pet, or the loss of a relationship can leave your heart aching as you grieve for who and what you’ve lost.

A portion of your life was occupied by that relationship and when it’s gone, there is a void left not only in your heart but in your life also. Time was spent in the relationship; you did things together while enjoying each other’s company. With a significant loss, it may be hard to figure out how to continue on with everyday life when so much of your life was wrapped up in what is now gone. Sometimes it’s the things we lose that cause a grieving heart. Homes and possessions are destroyed by fire, storms, and other disasters while some significant belongings are lost or stolen. The loss of special and irreplaceable things can also cause a vacant heart.

A story is told after the death of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish – Reish Lakish. His best friend and chevrotah Rabbi Yohanan became greatly distressed over his death, for he felt that he had now lost his most outstanding disciple and colleague. The Rabbi’s got together and decided that one of them would go to

Rabbi Yohanan as a new student to help relieve his mind. They decided to let Rabbi Elazar go because he was sharp and would be a sufficient substitute for Reish Lakish.

Rabbi Elazar went and sat before Rabbi Yohanan. After each statement made, Rabbi Elazar would agree with him and give examples of why. Rabbi Yohanan became visibly distressed and said to Rabbi Elazar: “Do you think you are just like Reish Lakish? Whenever I said something, Lakish would give me twenty-four reasons why I was wrong, and then I would give him twenty-four reasons why I was right. He would challenge me, and not let me rest until I proved to him why I was right. All you do is agree with me. Don’t you think that I know that what I said is right? I do not need to be told that I am right. What I need is the relentless questioning of Resh Lakish.” And so, Rabbi Yohanan continued to weep for his friend, crying out: “where are you Lakish, where are you?”<sup>1</sup>

As those of us that have lost someone close to us know, there will never be a way to replace them in our lives. Words such as, “it will be okay” or “you will soon move-on” echo hallow within our hearts. Because the truth is, and we all know this is true, no matter what we do nothing can ever bring them back. There is a hole in our hearts and our lives whenever we lose someone. No relationship will ever be the same as it was with that person, and it shouldn’t be. That is the way that life, and ultimately death is. We have but a short amount of time on this earth, and the relationships that we have while here are just as short. And we lose a friend, a lover, a child, or a grandparent, there is a void that is left that can never be filled – because they can be replaced.

I am sure that many of us heard the story of the 24 year old pitcher from the Miami Marlins, Jose Fernandez who died in a tragic boating accident two weeks ago. Fernandez was born in Cuba and ultimately defected in order to pursue his dream of a better life. He was gifted with an arm that would throw 100 mph, but it was his heart that was his true gift. At 15 years old while on a boat bound for Florida, Fernandez was making small talk with the captain and he heard a splash. Immediately he jumped in to save whoever was at that point 60 feet away from the boat. Swimming out, the boats spotlight shined on what turned out to be Jose Fernandez’s mother. Using one arm to hold her, and his other arm to paddle, he made it back to the boat with her safely.

Fernandez risked his life while heroically saving his mother from drowning. But incredibly, Fernandez admitted he didn’t know it was his mother when he jumped in the water to save her, meaning that at just 15 years old, he put his own life in peril to rescue someone who could have been a complete stranger.

There are many in Miami and Major League Baseball who felt the loss of Jose Fernandez. He was more than baseball, he was bigger than the game, than his team. As Tyler Kepner of the NY Times wrote, “The day after his death, with his entire team wearing his number 16 jersey, his best friend on the team Dee Gordon stepped to the plate. It did not win a pennant. It did not heal the aching heart of a sport and a community. And the one thing everyone wants — for Jose Fernandez to come bounding into Marlins Park and resume his life of joy — will never happen.”

But what Dee Gordon did as the Marlins’ leadoff hitter in their first game without their heartbeat, was one of those uplifting moments that make us care about sports. Gordon, a left-handed hitter, got into

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<sup>1</sup> Baba Metzia 84a

the batter's box as a righty, the side from which Fernandez hit. He took one pitch from that side, switched helmets, took another pitch, and then belted a fly ball high over right field.

It soared above a black scoreboard showing Fernandez's number, 16, the number every Marlin wore on his back on Monday, the number no Marlin will ever wear again. It landed in the second deck for a home run, the first in more than 300 at-bats this season for Gordon.

Nothing will ever replace his friend, but Dee Gordon at that moment felt like he was right there with him. It should never be assumed that anyone or anything could take the place of what you've lost; you can never replace what is gone. However, there are things you can do and people you can spend time with that will help your heart recover by filling the void that was left behind. What things could you do that would help fill the hole in your heart? There is no greater therapy for a broken, empty heart than to share that heart and spread love to others.

This may seem difficult at first but once you get started, you will realize the benefits. You can start out simply by sending a letter or card to someone who needs it, or telling a special person that you love him or her, or giving someone a hug or encouragement. Be courteous and show kindness to others; give a friend, or stranger, a compliment. Reach out of your comfort zone to connect with others. You may want to try calling a friend, reconnect with an old friend or make an effort to meet new friends. It can help to show love and affection to your pet or if you don't have one, adopt one.

You may want to volunteer your time and skills to a deserving person or organization. By helping others, they benefit from your assistance and yet your heart benefits even more. Rabbi Dreskin and his family chose to create the Jonah Maccabee Foundation, bringing together two powerful forces for good that Jonah cared deeply about, the well-being of others and that the people who those who cared for them.

In this way, we never forget those that we love. They are forever with us, in our hearts, and in our memories.

One of my favorite poems is written by e.e. Cummings. It goes:

*i carry your heart with me(i carry it in  
my heart)i am never without it(anywhere  
i go you go,my dear;and whatever is done  
by only me is your doing,my darling)  
i fear  
no fate(for you are my fate,my sweet)i want  
no world(for beautiful you are my world,my true)  
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant  
and whatever a sun will always sing is you*

*here is the deepest secret nobody knows  
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud  
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;which grows  
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)  
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart*

*i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)*

In short, this is a love poem in which the speaker is telling his beloved that wherever he goes, he always carries his lover's heart with him. The speaker is telling his lover how much he loves and adores her, telling her that she is his fate and his entire world. But we can take this even further with those that we have lost. They are never gone from our hearts, wherever we go we carry their hearts with our hearts, we carry within our heart.

Those that are no longer with us are imprinted upon us, like when we use pencil to write on paper. No matter how hard we erase, there is always just a little remnant left that will be there forever.

Last week, the entire country of Israel mourned one of their greatest leaders. Shimon Peres was truly the last of the great generation of leaders who helped found the State in 1948. A collective heart is beating with a void throughout the Jewish world.

Shimon Peres life of public service stretched over 70 years, but it is not difficult to pick out the highlight. In 1993 he was one of the group of politicians including Bill Clinton, Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin who signed the Oslo Accords - Israel's first peace deal with the Palestinians.

Peres told a watching world at a signing ceremony on the White House lawn, "We live in an ancient land," Our land is small, so must our reconciliation be great. I want to tell the Palestinian delegation that we are sincere... Let all of us turn from bullets to ballots, from guns to shovels. We shall pray with you. We shall offer you our help in making Gaza prosper and Jericho blossom again.

That speech perhaps crystallized the essence of how Shimon Peres will be remembered on the international stage - certainly how he would have liked to be remembered - as a hopeful and articulate Israeli advocate for peace.

This is the legacy of Shimon Peres that we will never forget. The generation of today, must not forget how great this man was. He really stood for peace – and we are forever in his debt for those few months of sanity.

The word legacy is frequently used to describe the property that people leave their heirs when they die. But every human being also leaves behind another legacy -- one that's harder to define but often far more important. This legacy comprises a lifetime of relationships, accomplishments, truths, and values, and it lives on in those whose lives they've touched.

This is how we will never forget those that we have lost. Their legacy is carried on with us in our hearts wherever we go. Author Ray Bradbury writes, "“Everyone must leave something behind when he dies . . . Something your hand touched some way so your soul has somewhere to go when you die . . . It doesn't matter what you do, so long as you change something from the way it was before you touched it into something that's like you after you take your hands away.”"

The legacy of Jonah Dreskin, Jose Fernandez, Shimon Peres, and everyone we have ever lost is in our hands. They touched our lives and left us too soon – it is always too soon. A void is left in our hearts where they once were. But within that void is a note, a note with a message for each of us. Carry it within our hearts until our very end, and pass it on to the next person. We must never let the memories of those we have loved be lost, and they never will when they remain within our hearts and within us. By living our lives just as they would have wanted us, we can lift ourselves up out of the darkness, and

we can lift each other up out that darkness. This is our task and our responsibility, this is how we remember.