
POETRY/FICTION

Yizkor Minyan: Memorial Suite

DALE LUPU

1
Burial

In the beginning after the end
memories steam off my sleep,
fogging the colors of the day.

At night, the missing weight of your limbs
etches a foreign Braille into our bed.
The mattress maps an unknown territory
of lumps and hollows.
My dreams
give no escape.

2
Shiva

Covering the mirrors is an old custom
discarded by my mother's generation.
But after her death
my friends come,
draping the cloths
to protect me
from seeing her face.

3
Shloshim

Absence makes its presence known.
I am accompanied at every move
by a shadow and a wish.

4
Yizkor #1

Standing with the others
the calmness of my grief
is itself another loss.
I had expected to fall to the floor screaming,
be taken with fits,
at least to tear out my hair.
Instead, we are a congregation mute together,
the cantor's breaking voice
a slender thread binding us in the present
with you in the past.

5
Yizkor #2

For months, every diaper changed
sang a kaddish for your soul.

Now you have ascended
or transmigrated
or dispersed.

I do not know
where to find you.
I look everywhere
and am lost.

6
Yizkor #3

Last month, I imagined I heard you answer.
This month, only the question
echoes in my mind.

I discover that intense pressure
will turn the questions into a lubricant of sorts,

Corresponding author: Dale Lupu, Ph.D., 502 Loudon
Court, Silver Spring, MD 20901, USA. E-mail: dlupu@daleview
associates.com

allowing moments of joy
to ease into the crevices of my heart.

7
Yizkor #4

It was a shofar call
that introduced the theme of your death into this
movement of my life.
It is a rondo, I think.
Or perhaps a theme and variation.
On closer listening, I can tell
this movement learned its tune from
Hovanness or Reich
instead of Beethoven and Bach.
It is a fractal repetition,
each sounding of a note containing the theme;
each phrase carrying within itself
the wholeness of all deaths.

8
Unveiling

Drawing the cloth off the stone
I remember closing the shroud
over your face.

When I leave here,
strewing a trail of pebbles behind,
I will wash myself into the ordinary calendar
of time.

9
Yizkor #5

This, then, is the story—
the high priest
turned the thread from
red to white.

My heart tries
to do the same,
but the secret name
is too long forgotten.

Contentment is a memory.
Kisses are a memory, too.
Those poignant ones from the days
after we learned the news.

I cannot forgive, nor turn away,
only enter in more deeply.
This is a sanctification of its own sort.
And a cleaving of one time from another.

10
Yizkor #6

You have joined my other dead,
a floating, fraying wisp
tied to me,
a cloth tied to the tail of a kite.

All my dead, they
stream out gloriously behind me,
steadying me
as I soar into the wind.

NOTES ON THE RITUALS REFERENCED BY THE POEMS

The Jewish rituals of mourning are designed to lead the mourner into and then gradually out of the deepest expression of grief. This suite of poems follows the course of grief through the traditional Jewish calendar of rituals for mourning. (Lest the reader become confused—different deaths are referenced by each poem.)

Burial: Jewish law and custom call for burial to occur as quickly as possible after the death, often within 24 hours.

Yizkor: A memorial service recited four times per year in the synagogue. In some congregations, it is the custom for people to stay for the service only if their parents or significant family members have died. Once a parent has died, a child recites Yizkor for the rest of his or her life.

Minyan: The minimum of 10 Jewish adults needed to form a congregation. Certain prayers are recited only in the presence of a minyan.

Shiva: Hebrew for seven. After a death, the first period of mourning observed by the family lasts for seven days. The mourners stay at home and observe many customs to express their grief. Members of the congregation come to the house to make up a minyan so that certain prayers can be said.

Shloshim: Hebrew for thirty. After the period of Shiva ends, mourners leave their house and return to work or school. However, they continue to abstain from music, parties, and other forms of celebration during the shloshim period.

Kaddish: The root of the word kaddish means holy or consecrated. Different forms of the Kaddish prayer are recited to mark transitions from one part of a religious service to another and to close periods of religious study. A particular form of the kaddish, known as the Mourner's Kaddish, is the prayer most associated with mourning. The prayer is striking in that it says nothing about death or loss, but is a powerful affirmation of God's great-

ness. There is a mystical belief that saying the kaddish in the year after someone's death can help their soul ascend to God.

Shofar: The ceremonial ram's horn that is blown in synagogue every day in the month preceding the New Year. It is also blown in a ritual pattern on Rosh Hashanah, the holiday of the New Year.

Unveiling: The tombstone or grave marker is not placed at the gravesite at the time of burial.

A simple ceremony is held to "unveil" the marker, usually 11 months to a year after the death. After the unveiling, the formal period of mourning ends, and the mourners return fully to ordinary routines and religious duties. When visiting a cemetery, it is customary to leave small stones or pebbles on the grave or headstone. It is also customary to wash one's hands when leaving a cemetery.