



WOMEN'S LEAGUE FOR CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

The Eikhah Project 5777

Caregiving and the Process of Dying

Introduction

How do we cope with the process of dying when it is not sudden or unexpected?

How do we know what another person is thinking or feeling when he or she is the one who is dying?

What can we do for that person and for ourselves when we become the caregiver for that precious person in our lives?

In this excerpted article, (August 30, 2016, The Washington Post) Tracy Grant, the deputy managing editor at The Washington Post, poses the question as to how something so profound and so potentially sad can represent a "best" time in her life.

I Was My Husband's Caregiver as He Was Dying of Cancer:

It was the Best Seven Months of My Life

Ten years ago this month, my world as I knew it ended. My husband of 19 years, the father of my two sons, was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Over the course of seven months, Bill went from beating me silly on the tennis court to needing my help to go to the bathroom and bathe. It was the best seven months of my life.

Maybe I don't actually mean that. But it was certainly the time when I felt most alive. I came to understand that whatever else I did in my life, nothing would matter more than this. Even though I really didn't know how this would end.

For me, there were no bad days. Some days were more difficult than others, but there were moments of joy, laughter, tenderness in every day---if I was willing to look hard enough.

Caregiving has gotten a bad name in this country. Being a caregiver to someone you love can be transcendent, a gift. And yet for too many it feels like punishment.

I concede that I was very fortunate when my husband became ill. I was young and healthy. I had a great employer who provided even better health insurance. My bosses basically told me that my full-time job (for which I would continue to be paid) was to take care of my husband.

During Bill's last weekend, we had dinner together. At that point, we no longer held onto the illusion of MacGyvering our way out of this predicament, although we still believed that he might come home one more time. We sat side by side on his hospital bed, sharing a...sandwich and watching television. ...

He would be dead in four days.

Ten years later, I haven't started a foundation to cure cancer. I haven't left the news business to get a medical degree. I work. I pay the bills. I try to be there for my sons. I will never again be as good a person as I was when I cared for Bill. I will never again have that high a purpose. But every day I also try to find and put into practice the person I became during those seven months. I try to be a little less judgmental, a little more forgiving, a little more generous, a little more grateful for the small moments in life. I am a better person for having been Bill's caregiver. It was his last, best gift to me."

Discussion questions

1. What were the lessons that Tracy and Bill each learned about caregiving?
2. What do you think of her title? What is her intent? How do you think she defines the word "best"?
3. Is it possible to compare the death of Tracy's husband with the death and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple?
4. In what way does Jeremiah become the caregiver of Jerusalem and the Temple? Do you think that Jeremiah would have sub-titled Eikhah with the words "the best time of his life"?