

But we had plans. This is the sentiment, often said through tears, that so many of us utter, when our loved ones die. But we had plans, we had a plan, and this was not the plan, not the future that I was imagining, that we were writing, and so what do I do now?

I was going to bring him to live with me when he couldn't live by himself anymore, and we were going to recraft our life around him and it would be expensive, but it would also be fun, and that was the plan. And now he is gone, but I had a plan.

We were going to grow old together, she and I. She was going to take care of me and we were going to laugh together even when we couldn't walk anymore. And now she is gone. But we had a plan.

She was so smart, and so vibrant. And she was going to grow up to be the greatest scientist and now she is gone, but we had so many plans for her life.

Those are three true reflections, though I've changed the details to protect privacy, but they were all spoken right from the depths of loss.

And I'll add my own family's recent loss of my uncle. His grandson's bar mitzvah is already on the calendar. He was going to have an aliyah and dance at it and eat and laugh. And maybe take one more shot at doing the worm, or at least we all would have been joking about that. We had plans. And he had plans. But now he is gone and those plans look and feel so different, so what do we do now?

This is often the way that loss works. Maybe you've come here and are thinking about someone who you lost recently or maybe you are sitting with memories from many many years ago. But somehow we all seem to know, in this kind of universally mournful way, that when someone we love dies, we grieve both not having them here right now to be with us, and also we grieve the lost future we had planned to have with them. A whole series of plans that got broken, changed, rewritten. The vacations or the grandchildren or the boring Tuesday nights, or the walks or the birthdays. So often, we had plans in our minds, and then our lives took a different turn. And so as we sit here remembering, we conjure up both our grief for our loved ones and also our grief for the futures we had imagined would unfold with them.

So I wondered a little about how this Yizkor of Shavuot might offer us some comfort as we make our way toward memory and the grief we have for our people and for the great and mundane plans with them that fell away, too.

Shavuot, we know, is the commemoration of the day we stood at Mount Sinai and received the Torah. In that moment, our eyes lit up by the ethereal lightning, our hearts filled by the pounding thunder, magic all around us, we had a plan, and a vision for our future as a people. It was all coming together. From that point forward, it would be just a bit over a month until we'd arrive at the Promised Land. That was the future we had in mind. But as we know, just a short bit later, our story unfolds differently than anyone expected it to. Moses sent spies out to look at the land

and they came home and the vast majority of them believed that the future they had dreamt up was actually unattainable. And this angered God so much that God in fact, made it unattainable for them. And their vision of being in the land within a month fell away. There was a great battle and many of them died there. And with them, the picture of the future that they had imagined for themselves.

They had been so hopeful at the mountain, but several weeks would now be 40 years and only their children would enter the land. They had a plan. And now, so many of their family had died by the sword and the future they all had together would not unfold that way at all. And the text says: וַיִּתְאַבְּלוּ הָעָם מְאֹד׃ The people were overcome by grief. Their loss was so profound, the text says, that they tried to proceed into their future story as it had been before this great loss happened to them - we will go forward, just as God told us to! But Moses told them - that way is not available to you anymore. And they wept and wept. And some tried to go anyway, because we want to hold on so hard to this plan we had for a future, but with death, it slips through our fingers and as Moses said - that way is not available to us anymore.

So what did they do? How did they move forward knowing it would be so different now. And how do we, as we remember our own loved ones?

When our people were in such deep grief, and found that they had to forge a new path - they found a way to carry their memories with them.

They built a portable mishkan, a Tabernacle to carry on their shoulders. Jewish tradition tells us that this Mishkan is none other than a portable version of Mount Sinai itself. What do they do? They take the mountain, and their memory of what they had at that mountain, with them.

On every step of their now new and unknown path, they would carry with them the Mishkan. It would remind them of the dream they dreamt at Sinai. It would be a memento of their loss. In it, when they gazed toward it, when they caught a glimpse of it, all that once was would come flooding back to them. Perhaps in poignance. Maybe sometimes it made them cry. To remember what they had lost and how their path took a new direction that they had not wished for or expected. But maybe sometimes it also reminded them of a time of laughter and the brightness of the lighting and the joy of the thunder and the bit of magic they felt then.

Surely in the beginning of their journey, it was much more bitter to see that traveling image of what once was. But as their journey progressed, the sting of it perhaps became less over time. This tells our story, too. Each of us here in this room is somewhere different on our journey of loss. We are closer to or farther from the mountain. Our memories, our lament about the plans we had - they are a sharp pain or a more dull aching - on our sleeve, or integrated as part of our whole being.

But this Mishkan, this memory of what was, who was, before our lives changed with our loss, it travels with us still. Sometimes in the stories we tell, and sometimes in pictures we go back and look through, sometimes in the faces of our children or grandchildren, sometimes in the words

that come out of our own mouths and we wonder - when did we start sounding just like our parent, or grandparent, or spouse?

Sometimes our mishkan of memory that travels with us are real life mementos. At my little cousin's bar mitzvah next year, we'll have our mishkan with us. And even though my Uncle Lou won't be there, we'll tell stories about him there, what he would be doing then. And we'll bring the puppet, which is a little dog puppet that our family passes around - because it will remind us of him. And in his grandson's voice as he chants Torah, so will be his Grandpa Lou's voice echoing through him.

What is the Mishkan that you are carrying now? Here on this different path, that wasn't the path you were planning to be on? What are your stories? What are the memories that take you right back to the foot of that mountain when all was still unfolding as you imagined it? What are the threads of your loved one's life that you carry with you still?

As we make our way into Yizkor, may we be strong enough to carry that Mishkan with us, to place our memories and broken expectations on our shoulders so that they may accompany us on our journeys.

May we remember the plans we had with a loving remembrance, a gentleness, even as we make our ways forward on a new path. May our memories give us strength, bring us comfort, and offer us company for the new paths we must forge. Amen.