We Will Dance Again
Yizkor Talk - Simchat Torah 5785
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The slogan of the survivors of the Nova Music Festival massacre is “we will dance again”. It’s an apt statement for those young people who survived such horrible events, it’s a fitting statement for the Jewish people on Simchat Torah a year after that most horrific of attacks on one of our holiest of days and it is a prayer for each of us who come here this day of yizkor to mourn our loved ones, those who we journeyed and sometimes danced through life with.

The poet wrote, “to everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven. A time to mourn and a time to dance.”

When is the right time? And is it simply a matter of time?

They say time heals, it doesn't heal, it numbs, it forgets, but healing is not simply a matter of time since the death of the loss. A physical wound does not heal because of time.

A physical wound heals through a series of well-coordinated stages that involve various cells and processes to repair the damaged tissue. Each of these phases is crucial, and their effectiveness can be influenced by factors such as the wound's size, depth, location, and a person's overall health.

The same is true for emotional wounds, wounded individuals, a wounded community and for the whole of the Jewish people that are emotionally shattered in the aftermath of October 7 and the hatred and violence that has followed.

I don’t want to dance again because I forgot the pain of my grief. We want to dance again because we remember the origin of our grief, because we understand the value of that person in our life, or that holiday that has been forever associated with the massacre. And we value and appreciate them so much that we refuse to allow their death to be the death of everything we love and enjoy. They would not have wanted that for us. Then death triumphs over life again and again.

We cannot give in to despair or perpetual sorrow, not as individuals mourning our

loved ones or a people mourning our tragedies and calamities. We must dance again, or the world, our world stops spinning and we die too and then the tragedy is compounded.

Elie Wiesel once wrote about a similar moment in Jewish history, after the shock, the death, the casualties and near catastrophe of the Yom Kippur War, when rabbis in America were faced with the question of whether to celebrate Simchat Torah in the aftermath of such overwhelming grief. He said, ‘On the eve of the Simchat Torah following the war, rabbis

in America were faced with a question of whether or not their congregations should celebrate this joyful holiday and the answer was unequivocal: Yes they should. Never mind that it wasn’t easy. Never mind that they didn’t feel like singing and dancing. Never mind that there were so many reasons against celebrating. We had to celebrate.’

This wisdom reminds us that our resilience is not about erasing our grief, but about choosing to affirm life in the midst of it. It is not easy, but it is essential.

But how do we begin to dance again? How do we find the strength to move, when the weight of sorrow pulls us down?

We begin by honoring the memory of those we've lost, not by remaining paralyzed in grief, but by carrying them with us into the future. Just as the body must actively engage in the process of healing a wound—sending cells to rebuild, clotting blood, and fighting infection—we too must engage in the difficult work of healing. We don't wait passively for time to soothe us; we participate in the restoration of our lives. We do not heal alone. When we recite

Yizkor, we do so as a community, side by side, shoulder to shoulder. We stand in solidarity with one another, lifting each other through our collective grief. Just as in the days of the Temple, when the Israelites brought their offerings together, we bring our tears, our memories, our shared sorrow to this sacred space. And here, in community, we find strength. Perhaps this is why our tradition emphasizes communal prayer and collective remembrance, because in gathering together we share the burden of loss, and together we begin the slow work of healing.

And what does that look like? It means allowing ourselves to feel joy again without guilt. It means creating new memories, new traditions, new dances, while still holding onto the ones we lost. This is not a betrayal of those who are gone, but a testament to the life they lived.

For many, there is a fear that by dancing again, by feeling joy, we are somehow betraying the ones we've lost. But this is not true. Our tradition teaches that joy and sorrow are not opposites—they can coexist. The Psalmist writes, 'Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.' Our tears

are not erased by joy, and our joy is not diminished by the presence of grief. Rather, they live side by side, enriching one another. By living fully, by celebrating life, we honor the memory of those we've lost. We carry them with us, their love and their spirit, into everything we do. They would want us to live, to laugh, to celebrate, because in doing so, we affirm the gift of life they gave us.

We carry their love, their laughter, their spirit, and we bring it with us into the dance of life that continues. Throughout our long history, the Jewish people have faced

unimaginable loss, from the destruction of the Temple to the tragedies of the Holocaust. And yet, we have always danced again. We rebuilt, we mourned, and we carried our memories with us into the future. This is who we are. Our tradition teaches us to be resilient, to affirm life even in the darkest times. After the Holocaust, when survivors emerged from the camps, broken and scarred, they did not give up on life. They rebuilt communities, they founded a Jewish State, they had children, they danced at weddings, and they sang songs of hope. This resilience, this ability to choose life despite everything, is the

inheritance they passed down to us, and it is the strength we must find within ourselves today.

The survivors of the Nova Music Festival speak not only for themselves but for all of us when they say, ‘We will dance again.’ It is a proclamation of resilience, of defiance in the face of terror and destruction. And it is a proclamation we must make as well—both in our personal grief and in the collective grief of our people.

The final verse of the poem from Ecclesiastes reminds us, ‘God has made

everything beautiful in its time.’ Beauty, joy, and even dance will come in time, not because we forget, but because we remember—and because we choose life.

So, how do we begin to dance again? Each of us will find our own way. Perhaps it’s through carrying on a cherished tradition, sharing a meal that reminds us of our loved one, or performing an act of kindness in their honor. Maybe it’s as simple as allowing ourselves to smile when we think of them, instead of being overcome by sorrow. Maybe it is placing a stone every time we visit their grave and honouring the promise

of carrying their life's lessons, the essence of their n'shamah, the essence of their being as part of our purpose in this world as I spoke about on Kol Nidrei.

Whatever it looks like for you, I invite you to take that step, to find one small way to bring their memory into the dance of life. In this way, we honor them—not by staying in the dark, but by stepping into the light.

In a few moments, we will recite Yizkor. We will remember those we have lost, and we will mourn them. But let us also remember the call to live, to dance again, to celebrate

again—not as a rejection of our grief, but as a fulfillment of the promise that life, and all its beauty, will rise again after the darkness.