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Comfort for the bereaved

Four years ago I wrote about a bereavement support group I was attending to help me cope with the challenge of losing my father, Gabriel Cohen (1908–2007).

For the benefit of the other group members, I had made a list of excerpts from sympathy letters that relatives and friends had sent to my father in 1999 when my mother, Helen Cohen died. I had written, “Some of those words are here for you in hopes that if a time comes when you need to hear or offer words of comfort, they will be helpful.”

That time of need recently came for me and I found myself looking again at these words of wisdom. After rereading these words below, I recognized that since my original writing, some of these letter-writers have themselves passed away. It made me realize that one is still able to receive comfort from loved ones even though that person is no longer living.

“It is difficult to accept the reality of death, but we are born with the awareness that life is temporary. We old-timers with enough experience know that there is an end to our temporal existence and [we] develop our own philosophical outlook and personal faith.”
Rabbi Gedalyah Engel, West Lafayette, Ind.

“We invest a lot of ourselves in our loved one, so that she becomes an integral part of our own life. No one can replace her...As you know, we must accept God’s inscrutable will. God’s intended imperfections of our life and the universe was to inspire us to make our life better. We are partners with God, and perhaps some day we will be able to conquer some of these diseases and physical imperfections. In the meanwhile, we must live this life, with all of its challenges as well as fulfillments, the best way we can.”
Rabbi Harold L. Gelfman, Jacksonville, Fla.

“Your departed dear one has bequeathed innumerable fond and deathless memories, which will keep her alive in your hearts and minds for an enduring blessing.”
Rabbi Morton M. Applebaum, Boca Raton, Fla.

“[Even with the best choice of] words, it is difficult to assuage the pain which is yours. Prayerfully, the knowledge that you shared her life for so many years in a constructive and rewarding manner will bring you some measure of comfort in these difficult days. You and others were immeasurably enriched by her life and now diminished by her passing.”
William Z. Novick, Chicago

“Words of comfort are difficult to accept at a time like this, I know, but having the knowledge that so many of your friends share your loss will, I hope, be an ameliorating

factor. May the fond memories and good times shared...be a source of comfort and serve as a means of easing your sorrow." *Philip Lax, Maplewood, N.J.*

"Even while we mourn the death of a cherished one, there is room in our hearts for thankfulness for that life. We have lost what we have had. For those years of love and comradeship, there is no adequate compensation. Impoverished as we are by the passing of our beloved, we would be poorer by far if we never tasted the joy and richness of that union. May the pain of parting be mitigated by faith in a divine providence, which permits no life to be utterly destroyed." *Author Unknown*

"It is so difficult to know what to say at a time like this. I hope and pray that soon your feelings of loss and grief will transform to acceptance and peace." *Miriam Zimmerman, San Mateo, Calif.*

"Tragedy and sorrow come to us all – its part of what it means to be human and alive. So if we have one miracle to make our own, one strength – let it be the strength to turn curses into blessings, to learn joy from sadness, and life from death." *Rabbi Steven Z. Leder, Los Angeles, Calif.*

Jennie Cohen 5-18-11

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