



Connections and Reflections

By Pam Morris, Early Learning Center director

It has been almost two years since I lost my father. He was the wind beneath my wings, my biggest supporter, the sarcastic comedian (he was born in Brooklyn), the steady, analytical thinker that could remain calm when all was chaotic around him.

It is often difficult for me to place his death into the context of this time of year that I love so much. To say that his death had a profound impact on my thoughts and feelings would truly be an understatement. It is traditional in Judaism to light a candle for a loved one's yahrtzeit (the anniversary of their death). The secular date was Jan. 1, 2021 but his Hebrew date of death is the 17th of Tevet, which falls on Jan. 10, 2023. This period of time always has me focused on who he was in my life and his connections to his family, both near and far, to their synagogues over the years and to his friends. These connections will be his legacy he leaves behind to us, especially those to his granddaughters. But thinking about all the funny, quirky things my dad did, made me appreciate the connection I had with him, that others had with him and long for ways to define how to make these just as special with others in my life. These connections are what I miss the most.

What does it mean to connect with another person, to truly be a part of their lives, even if just for a moment in time?

For everyone this will look different and no one way is better or more right than another. So I will share how I connect with others. Whether it is via a video conferencing program, on the telephone, via texting or in person, I listen. I want to hear what you have to say, what you want to share, what



you want me to know. I am present in our conversation so I don't miss anything you have to impart. I have learned the importance of this listening skill (and am still learning) as I connect with others.

Eye contact goes a long way to forming that strong bond between people. Texting and phone calls definitely make this more difficult and it is why so many people (read teens) have trouble forming that close unity with others. Texting is the most problematic in this important skill. With phone calls, you can hear the nuances in someone's voice. You can hear the sarcasm, the laughter, the stress, the sadness, the care and the love when you talk with another person. Texting doesn't allow for any of this, unless you are using emojis. I suppose that is how the younger generation are bypassing the need for phone calls and face-to-face interactions.

Reflections

And what about that second part; the reflection aspect? I think that once you listen to another and make that connection, you need to take a figurative step back and appreciate these connections. Think about how they make you feel and how you have affected them. Appreciate their perspective and learn from it, even if it is only to strengthen your resolve in the opposite direction. Take what they have to offer, enjoy it for all that it is worth. Then repackage it with what you have to give and share it ten-fold with that person and with others.

And while this is all coming from the perspective of adult to adult, please adapt it for the generations in your life. If you have children in your life as their parent, caregiver, aunt, uncle, grandparent, cousin, friend, listen to what they have to say.



It is so important to welcome people into your life and just connect. Show them who you are, what individual qualities make you unique, let them learn from you through listening, modeling and just being around you.

Lillian Katz, a renowned early childhood educator, writes in her article, "What Should Young Children Be Learning," that there are four areas that are important in early childhood education: Knowledge, Skills, Feelings and Dispositions.

"Dispositions are not learned through instruction or drill," she says. "The dispositions that children need to acquire or strengthen – curiosity, creativity, cooperation, friendliness – are learned primarily from being around people who exhibit them." Through connections with children and with others, you will be able to show the attributes you value, modeling them so that your children and those you connect with, will take on these same traits so that everyone can benefit. It's how we can make the connections and reflections be the positivity on even the darkest days.

Wishing you all connections to your loved ones and Shabbat Shalom.