

**Shmini Atzeret Yizkor 5780**  
**People We Love Keep Us Warm**  
**Rabbi Alex Freedman**

Two weeks ago it officially turned cold outside. But clothes and heat aren't enough to keep us warm. *People we love* keep us warm.

Let me share a story which illustrates this.

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, he of musical fame, used to travel the world to perform and inspire. Once he was in a small town in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Usually the locals enthusiastically welcomed him, but in this town everybody shut him out. Except for one man. Only one person was open, welcoming, *warm*.

Before he left town, Reb Shlomo asked him: "I understand why the people of this town don't trust an outsider. They were rocked by the Holocaust and communism. But I don't understand *you!* Why are you so loving in a place that is not?"

The man smiled. He said, "I know why, and I'll tell you. I'm an old man, but I've lived here my whole life. Before World War One, a rumor spread that a pogrom was coming. So all the parents brought their children to the rabbi's house. It was the dead of winter, and children were sprawled on the floor in every room in the house. While we slept, the rabbi paced back and forth, standing guard. I was curled up in a small corner of the study. While he thought I was asleep, I was not - it was too cold for me. He came up behind me and *slipped his cloak* off his shoulders. He put it on me and said, 'Good child, sweet child.' It's been 75 years since the rabbi put his cloak on me - but it still keeps me warm."

The cloak helped keep him warm in the moment, but this gesture of love kept him warm for a lifetime. People we love keep us warm.

It's why the heart is red. But the absence of people we love make us feel cold. Sometimes, on cool days like today we can bundle up endlessly but still feel cold. Other times, in the summer, it can be hot outside and we can still feel cold. Because some of those people are gone. They were a father, a mother, a brother, a sister, a husband, a wife, G-d forbid a son or daughter, or another relative.

We felt warm when they tucked us in at night.

We felt warm when they held our hand.

We felt warm when they wrapped us in a hug with a kiss.

We felt warm when they smiled at us.

We felt warm when we made them laugh.

We felt warm when they said “I love you.”

They kept us warm with love, warm enough for us to share love with others: a husband, a wife, a son, a daughter, a friend, another relative. They taught us to love, which is the greatest lesson of all. We still feel their warmth.

But sometimes even in their presence we felt cold.

We felt cold when got angry at them.

We felt cold when we talked back to them.

We felt cold when we said something behind their back.

We felt cold when we made them angry or tearful. How we wish we could go back and do things differently! We still feel cold when we think about these moments.

But now, in Yizkor, we should feel the warmth of their embrace and love, for those lasted a lifetime. Maybe that’s one reason we light a memorial candle to mark Yizkor: the flame gives off heat because that person’s soul radiated warmth.

We felt warm when we celebrated Jewish holidays together, at home, at friends and family’s houses, at synagogue. Even in a cold Sukkah, with people we love we feel warm.

In the Torah, the most powerful expression of love describes Jacob’s love for his son Benjamin, his youngest son, born to his favorite wife Rachel. The Torah says about them, “*Nafsho Keshura BNafsho.*” One’s soul is bound up with the other. One soul embracing, hugging the other. The Abarbanel says this means they were two bodies who shared the same soul. When one’s soul is bound up with another, the love and closeness remains even when their body is gone. Because the soul is eternal.

In a moment we’ll say Yizkor, which we’ve all done before. If you’re like me, it may have made you physically cold in the past. This time, I want you to try to feel their warmth, their love. Imagine that with these few special people you are *Nafsho Keshura BNafsho*, and for these few minutes your soul is once again bound up with theirs, embracing in a hug.

The rabbi’s cloak on the boy’s shoulders warmed him for 75 years because it was an act of love, an act of *Lev*, the Hebrew for heart.

Feel their hug once again, and may it always keep you warm.