

## *Another Approach to the “Celebration of Life”*

I’ve mentioned before that I’m not a fan of the expression “a celebration of life.” Better said, of course we remember the lives of our loved ones, especially the good they have done for our families and community, but so soon after a death our sadness must be affirmed and not via a “celebration,” as it were. However – please read on – I’ve come to realize that perhaps we can and should celebrate a person’s life *months after the funeral*.

Lou Brown z”l, of Adas Kodesch shel Emeth died during the pandemic. The graveside service was, as you can imagine, attended by very few people as has been the case for the deceased of every faith over these troublesome months. And just as others indicated that a more substantial event would be held after the pandemic – whenever that would be – so, too, in Lou’s case. Indeed, at the end of July there was such an event at the Siegel JCC.

I eulogized Lou at his funeral. His wife Faith asked me to repeat my eulogy for the event. But I was not the only one to speak. In fact there were many who offered tributes to Lou. When the program was over (and, yes, I’m calling it a “program” at this point), Suzy and I realized that had all those people spoken the same words at the funeral it would undoubtedly not have the impact it did months later. This “event,” “program” was indeed a “celebration of life,” and that term was absolutely appropriate.

I’ve always told people in mourning that no more than three people should offer eulogies at a funeral; more would be counterproductive. The job of the mourners is to mourn, something that occurs following the funeral. They cannot hear the words of others – the sentiments and remembrances simply will not register – at the most difficult time of a family’s life. As a matter of fact, many in the mental health field believe that you cannot even mourn properly until the deceased has been buried, and I’ve found that to be the case so often.

So perhaps we should have very simple interments with a few people speaking, but at a later date (*sh’loshim*: 30 days or *yahrzeit*: the anniversary of the death, or any time in between), if one chooses, truly celebrate the life of the person in a different emotional environment. As I mention to those gathered at an unveiling which usually occurs within the year, there is sadness but it’s a different kind of sadness.

The same is true in what I'm describing with regard to Lou Brown's celebration. The loss lingers but people could now truly listen, listen from the heart, to what made the person so special. In my opinion, it's something to think about.