

Losing a Child

“If you have read (and I am sure many of you have read) Viktor Frankl’s book ‘Man’s Search For Meaning.’ Wonderful book. Remember what Frankl says in the book. That people can take everything away from us except the power to decide what we are going to do about it.

I want to tell you something. Your child’s death has no meaning. Your child’s death has no meaning until you give it meaning. You decide what the death of your child will mean to you and your family. You decide if this is going to cause you to become jealous, bitter and cynical. Or if it will make you more compassionate and sensitive. That is in our power to decide.

What I tell people now when I speak to audiences like ours, when your child was dying you did everything you could for him. Now that he is gone, now that she is gone, there is one more thing that you can do. You can live his unlived years. That’s the one thing you can decide to do for the child you lost. Live their unlived years. In the same way that you inherited their stereo, and their bicycle, and their magazine collection, when they were no longer in a position to use them. You inherited all the years they never got around to living. It is the most precious thing your child left you. For God’s sake don’t waste them.

I talk to so many bereaved parents who say to me I can’t laugh anymore. I can’t go to the movies anymore. I can’t go to places I used to go with my child. It is just too painful. And I try and tell them, the real tribute to your child is not to become a professional mourner. Not to become a professional bereaved parent. The real tribute to your child is to live those unlived years.

Do all the things he or she never got around to doing. And feel your child present with you as you do them. It is the one thing you still have from your child. The years he left to you because he never got there. Use them wisely.”

- Rabbi Harold Kushner | TCF Conference, Keynote in Seattle, 1994