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Experiential Dislocation
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I recently attended the funeral of a partner at my firm. He was a practicing member of the Jewish faith. The service was held in a huge Synagogue filled with mourners, as he was a very active member of the community and had a prominent position in his Synagogue. The population of mourners was predominately members of the Jews faith dressed primarily in black, and each male mourner was given a yarmulke as a head covering. Solemn music was playing as we were ushered into the beautiful Synagogue and took our seats to await the beginning of the service.

My initial feeling was a sense of sadness and peculiarity as I was clearly in the minority audience. I initially struggled with focusing on the service as I tried to process the comments one of my colleagues expressed when she noticed I was a part of the group from my firm in the congregation. With a puzzled look, she sarcastically stated, "I'm surprised to see you here; how well did you knew Michael?" Before I could respond, another colleague quickly and quietly engaged her by asking, "What! Why is that important?" I thanked him, but immediately her question made me feel out of place. As I took a cursory look around the room, it was apparent that I was one of about five minority mourners. However, besides the initial uncomfortable and odd feeling that came over me due to my colleague's question, I felt welcomed. There was no

choir, no pomp and circumstance. The simple wooden casket was closed and was not adorned with flowers, as I am accustomed to seeing at a Christian funeral. At the onset of the service, the congregation stood, and a piece of black cloth was torn and given to members of the immediate family. I later inquired about the significance of this ritual and was informed that it is called the "K'riah," which is symbolic of the expression of grief. An internal solemn feeling came over me as the Rabbi opened the service with a prayer in Hebrew. Even though there was no translation in English, I still felt the presence of the Spirit as the prayer was being presented in the form of a song.

Besides being Michael's colleague, I had gotten to know him and his wife during his struggle with cancer, and I was responsible for assisting them in navigating the complicated process associated with his medical care. I can recall reassuring him that I would continue to help Terri, his wife, for as long as she needed me. A congregation member presented the 23 Psalm in Hebrew, again in a song, and other members read from the Torah while family members and friends gave brief tributes, some very humorous, similar to the practice at a Christian funeral. I blended in with the congregation, and slowly I felt a sense of comfort and familiarity as the musician skillfully played classical songs that I recognized.

I could see some congregation members taking a second look at me; some smiled at me with a sense of acceptance, while some just stared, which I expected. However, what caused me to be aware of my difference was being asked by members of the congregation how I knew Mike. “Where did you meet, how long did you know him, and are you okay?” I began to feel the color of my skin instead of experiencing the shared sense of loss for another human being. However, at the end of the beautiful service, Terri and I finally met in person, and she gave me a

big hug and expressed her gratitude for my help during Mike's illness. Our embrace was genuine, as I was familiar with her loss. I could see the pain on her face, the same pain any human would have at losing a loved one, regardless of ethnicity.

The other few mourners I could identify with also appeared to have that quiet gaze like I did at times during the service. A lift of our brows was a reaction to the internal dialogue we engaged in our minds, "this is different." One experience I noted was when an Asian mourner entered the restroom and saw me, and she immediately spoke to me. She did not ask questions about my relationship with the family, she began to share that it was her first time attending a Jewish funeral. She, too, was touched by the sense of reverence, simplicity, and beautiful service. She also echoed my thoughts on the K'riah ritual and her appreciation for the warmth of some of the mourners, which confirmed my experience.

I believe that life’s events, where there is a meshing of ethnic groups, present an opportunity for growth, learning, and understanding. It also displays the weakness in humanity as it relates to acceptance of our differences and the importance of reconciliation. Although death is a road each mourner at the service had traveled before, I still witnessed the daggers of racism and, at times, felt disconnected. Though the service was beautiful, the ugliness of our racial differences was on display. I have learned that reconciliation is a slow individual process that can only be achieved by embracing the consciousness of our shared humanity.