

Hearing

What do you say to the bereaved?
What conversation at the shiva?

“He lived a good life.”
“At least she lived to see her daughter’s wedding.”
“He no longer suffers.”
“She lived a long life” . . . ?

What wisdom do we speak
to comfort
to console
to soften the blow
to try the tears
to mitigate the pain?

There is a time to speak
And there is a time to be silent
Now is the time to be silent
Now is the time for the eloquence of listening
The ear listens to the soliloquy of the other
The dialogue will come later
Words are ambiguous, well meaning
Meant to raise the spirits.

But more often than not
Falter and fail
The ear makes no such error
It heals by paying attention
Not by active intervention.

This is not the time for lecture
This is a time to wait
 To allow the mourner to mourn
 To allow the bereaved to cry out her pain.
What do you say to the bereaved?
What do we do at the shiva?

We stand and sit and hold each other
 And we wait
Without impatience, we wait
And at the door
When we come in and when we leave
We do not say, “Shalom”
In silence, we embrace, and we listen.

