Yizkor

**WE RECALL**

Some of us recall parents who gave us life, who cared for us and nurtured us and who taught us to take our first steps on our own.

Some of us remember a wife, husband, or partner—our friend and lover—whom we shared so much of our lives, our failures and achievements, joys and sorrows, intimate secrets.

Some of us recall brothers and sisters, who matured together with us, sometimes competing with us, and sometimes encouraging us on, bound to us by a lifelong relationship.

Some of us remember children, entrusted to us too briefly, to whom we gave our loving care and from whom we received a trust that enriched our lives. Their memory is always with us.

Many of us recall relatives who knew us, teachers who affected us, and beloved friends who walked beside us in life, guiding us, listening to us, supporting us.

Our lives are shaped by those who were alongside us as we walked on our path.

May our inheritance impel us to strive to live lives of holiness and service. May memories of love inspire us to love; may painful memories impel us to mitigate the pain others experience. And may we be granted the strength to affirm life’s meaning, even in the face of death.

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**INTRODUCTION.** Yizkor is a time set aside to formally include in our thoughts and prayers family and friends who have passed away. In reciting Yizkor, the veil between the worlds of the living and the dead becomes more transparent. For some, memories of family and friends evoke by the festival add to our sense of fullness and peace. For some, those memories bring sadness at the loss of those we loved. For still others, these memories may be disquieting. Whatever our circumstances, as we travel through the cycle of the year, the people who were once with us in person travel with us in spirit.

The opening to a heavenly world, which Yizkor evokes, is symbolized by holding a Torah during the service and our standing as we recite the prayers recalling those who have died. Some communities begin doing so as these opening meditations are recited; some do so when the personal prayers for the departed are recited (page 335).

**WHAT ARE HUMAN BEINGS**

The verses in this passage come from Psalms 144:3–4, 90:6, and 90:12.

**WE RECALL.** A prayer written by Mordecai M. Kaplan, Eugene Kohn, and Ira Eisenstein, and adapted here.

**ADONAI, what are human beings that You take account of them, mortals that You care for them?**

Humans are as a breath, their days like a passing shadow.

In the morning they flourish anew; in the evening they shrivel and die.

Teach us to count each day, that we may acquire a heart of wisdom.
MY FATHER COMMANDED ME NOT TO DIE
But my father, before he died, commanded me not to die.
Never to stop breathing.
Only to seem silent, while my soul secretly continues to be sus-
pended in the ether.
So I go on living. I will not stop living. Neither non-existence nor
fear, nor closely-knit woven gloom, its cloth cloaking the sun,
will make me tremble,
not the emptiness with which my loved ones leave me, silently
taken one by one.
I continue to breathe and with my breath, I give life to birds,
wild beasts,
shreds of sky, clumps of clay.

—RIVKA MIRIAM

A PERSONAL MEDITATION
Eternal God, Master of mercy, give me the gift of remembering.
May my memories of the dead be tender and true, undiminished
by time; let me recall them, and love them, as they were.
Shelter me with the gift of tears.
Let me express my senses of loss—my sorrow, my pain,
as well as my love, and words unspoken.
Bless me with the gift of prayer.
May I face You with an open heart, with trusting faith,
unembarrassed and unashamed.
Strengthen me with the gift of hope.
May I always believe in the beauty of life, the power of goodness,
the right to joy.
May I surrender my being, and the soul of the dead,
to Your all-knowing compassion.

The deaths of those we now recall
left holes in our lives,
but we are grateful for the gift of their love.
May their memory, recalled this day,
be a blessing for us
and all who come to know us.
On Pesah

I never think of myself as waiting for you, but then when the holiday has come and gone, when I’m packing up the Pesah dishes or taking down the sukkah, I feel hopeless and alone.

inconsolable.

Then I realize
I’ve left a small corner somewhere deep inside myself unpainted, and in that small corner, I’m still a child, a little girl, waiting.

And I had hoped without knowing it that this bag you’d come.

My tears fall on the Pesah dishes and I wonder why you’ve left me here alone.

—MERLE FELD

Tam is who you were.
Simple and whole.
You asked, “What is this?” I needed to know, but was too sophisticated to ask.
Now, belatedly, I wonder, what is this . . . seder? what is this . . . life? what is this . . . death? what is this . . . God?

Wise is who you were. You wanted to know every little thing there is to know to serve God. Details, you wanted details. We thought your mind was narrow when it was simply in love.
Now I miss your intense yearning for your beloved, content to be restrained by “no” or liberated by “yes.”

Wicked is who you were. You just couldn’t stop pushing, rejecting. Did I owe you patience or impatience? I still don’t know. Your rage chased away my love more than once.

Did you provoke something in me, though. I wish I had known how to love you and I wish you had known how to love me.

Unable to ask is who you were. It was up to me to open up for you the questions of life I wished you could ask. Not only to lighten my burden though I can’t deny that was true, but so you could say your beauty to us, to your world.
You were my mystery. To find you I had to study hard at the school of gentleness.

In truth, it is not for me to judge who you were and anyway I cannot begin to know.

You may have been a whole new number, the fifth or sixth or seventh child, a new creation, inviting the sea to split upon God’s command not into upper and lower but one side facing the other. Then we, whole worlds, could stumble through, toward our redemptions great and simple.

—LILLY KAUFMAN
On Shavuot

Spring roses bloom, fragrant with heady Torah, layers of sevens fluttering as we enter our huppah with God. My teachers, you escort me. You taught me first words, first songs, first steps; You taught me the slow craft of doing work well. You taught me patience to sketch my thoughts; You taught me rules which I broke and then mended. You taught me impatience with what is unjust. You taught me to listen for truth and to seek it. You taught me life lessons before they could hurt me; You comforted me when they did; You were my best listener. You taught me to hurry to do a mitzvah; that inconvenience in service of others is blessed.

You escort me still, as you always did. You taught me that books catch living voices. You smiled inwardly as I learned what has long been known. Your presence taught me to breathe with another; to notice their pain and to be, just be near.

On this splendid day, of hearing sights, seeing noise, of great laws, noble truths, I thank you for moments of learning, still open and opening.

This rose of learning I accept as your student. I will plant and tend it in your name. It will release to the air its rare essence stirred by the passing of its great gardeners.

—LILLY KAUFMAN

The Book of Ruth and Naomi

When you pick up the Tanakh and read the Book of Ruth, it is a shock how little it resembles memory. It’s concerned with inheritance, lands, men’s names, how women must wiggle and wobble to live. Yet women have kept it dear for the beloved elder who cherished Ruth, more friend than daughter. Daughters leave. Ruth brought even the baby she made with Boaz home as a gift. Where you go, I will go too, your people shall be my people, I will be a Jew for you, for what is yours I will love as I love you, oh Naomi my mother, my sister, my heart. Show me a woman who does not dream a double, heart’s twin, a sister of the mind in whose ear she can whisper, whose hair she can braid as her life, twist its pleasure and pain and shame. Show me a woman who does not hide in the locket of bone that deep eye beam of fiercely gentle love she had once from mother, daughter, sister; once like a warm moon that radiance aligned the tides of her blood into potent order.

At the season of first fruits, we recall two travellers, co-conspirators, scavengers making do with leftovers and mill ends, whose friendship was stronger than fear, stronger than hunger, who walked together, the road of shards, hands joined.

—MARGE PIERCY
A Yizkor Meditation in Memory of a Parent Who Was Hurtful

Dear God,  
You know my heart. Indeed, You know me better than I know myself, so I turn to You before I rise for Kaddish.  

My emotions swirl as I say this prayer. The parent I remember was not kind to me. His/her death left me with a legacy of unhealed wounds, of anger and of dismay that a parent could hurt a child as I was hurt.  

I do not want to pretend to a love or to a grief that I do not feel, but I do want to do what is right as a Jew and as a child.  

Help me, O God, to subdue my bitter emotions that do not feel, but I do want to do what is right as a Jew and as a child.  

An Eternal Window

In a garden I once heard a song or an ancient blessing.  
And above the dark trees a window is always lit, in memory of the face that looked out of it, and that face too was in memory of another lit window.  

—Yehuda Amichai (translated by Chana Block)
לֹּא יִזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נִשְׁמוֹת כׇּל־אָחֵינוּ בּוֹן־יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים נָשִׁים, וָטַּף, בְּֽהַיּוֹם לִבְרָכָה שֶׁהָלכוּ לעוֹלָם בְּגַן עֵֽדֶן תּהִי מנוּחָתָם, בּגַן עֵֽדֶן שֶׁהָלכוּ לעוֹלָם. יִזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נִשְׁמוֹת ידִידֵינוּ חֶבְרֵי הַקָּהָל הַקָּדָשׁ שֶׁשֹּכֵן בַּשֶּׁאֱלֹהִים אֶת־נִשְׁמוֹת כׇּל־אָחֵינוּ בּוֹן־יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁיִּהְהוּ שֶׁיִּהְוֶה שֶׁיִּאֵגַו וּשׁוֹרֵב שֶׁבַּאָֽשֶׁר בְּֽהוֹן־יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁיִּהְוֶה שֶׁיִּאֵגַו וּשׁוֹרֵב שֶׁבַּאָֽשֶׁר בְּֽהוֹן־יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Exalted, compassionate God, grant perfect peace in Your sheltering presence, among the holy and the pure, whose radiance is like the heavens, to the souls of all those we have recalled today. May their memory be a blessing, and may they rest in paradise. Master of mercy, may they find eternal shelter beneath Your wings, and may their souls be bound up in the bond of life. ADONAI is their portion. May they rest in peace. And let us say: Amen.

IN MEMORY OF CONGREGANTS

Some congregations add the following:

יהְוָה שֶׁהִזְכַּֽרְנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נִשְׁמוֹת ידִידֵינוּ חֶבְרֵי הַקָּהָל הַקָּדָשׁ שֶׁשֹּכֵן בַּשֶּׁאֱלֹהִים אֶת־נִשְׁמוֹת כׇּל־אָחֵינוּ בּוֹן־יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁיִּהְוֶה שֶׁיִּאֵגַו וּשׁוֹרֵב שֶׁבַּאָֽשֶׁר בְּֽהוֹן־יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁיִּהְוֶה שֶׁיִּאֵגַו וּשׁוֹרֵב שֶׁבַּאָֽשֶׁר בְּֽהוֹן־יִשְׂרָאֵל.

May God remember the souls of our friends, members of this holy congregation, who have gone to their eternal home. May their souls be bound up in the bond of life. May they rest in peace honored in God's presence. Amen.

Exalted, compassionate God, comfort the bereaved families of this congregation. Help us to perpetuate everything that was worthy in the lives of those no longer with us, whom we remember this day.

May their memory endure as a blessing. Amen.

FOR MARTYRS AND THE SIX MILLION

Some congregations add the following:

יוֹרְם אַל־זָּרַד אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נִשְׁמוֹת כָּל־אָחֵינוּ בּוֹן־יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁהִזְכַּֽרְנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נִשְׁמוֹת ידִידֵינוּ חֶבְרֵי הַקָּהָל הַקָּדָשׁ שֶׁשֹּכֵן בַּשֶּׁאֱלֹהִים אֶת־נִשְׁמוֹת כׇּל־אָחֵינוּ בּוֹן־יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁיִּהְוֶה שֶׁיִּאֵגַו וּשׁוֹרֵב שֶׁבַּאָֽשֶׁר בְּֽהוֹן־יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁיִּהְוֶה שֶׁיִּאֵגַו וּשׁוֹרֵב שֶׁבַּאָֽשֶׁר בְּֽהוֹן־יִשְׂרָאֵל.

May God remember the souls of the martyrs of our people, who gave their lives for the sanctification of God's name, and the men women and children who were slaughtered, burned, and killed in the Holocaust. In their memory we pray. May our lives reflect a measure of their bravery, dedication, and purity of soul. May their souls be bound up in the bond of life; may they be remembered with honor and may they rest in peace at Your right hand forever. Amen.

May God remember the souls of congregants who gave their lives for the sanctification of God's name, and the six million martyrs and the six million. May their memory endure as a blessing. Amen.

Exalted, compassionate God, grant perfect peace in Your sheltering presence, among the holy and the pure, whose radiance is like the heavens, to the souls of all those we have recalled today. May their memory be a blessing, and may they rest in paradise. Master of mercy, may they find eternal shelter beneath Your wings, and may their souls be bound up in the bond of life. ADONAI is their portion. May they rest in peace. And let us say: Amen.
IN EVERYTHING
In everything there is at least an eighth part
that is death. Its weight is not great.
With that secret and carefree grace
we carry it everywhere we go.
On lovely awakenings, on journeys,
in lovers’ words, in our distraction
forgotten at the edges of our affairs
it is always with us. Weighing
hardly anything at all.
—LEA GOLDBERG (translated by Rachel Tzvia Back)

GIFT
You teach your children
what you’ve been taught
about the generosity of limitations,
the shortness of life, but also the future
you could only find
when you found life’s limits,
not the death you lived
but death itself, the real-you death,
divvying up your assets—
your heart, your savvy, your love of interpretation,
and interpretation of love
as whatever fulfills your wish
to be and to give
everything that gives itself to you,
that gave your children to you and you to them
when the lines between you were cut or frozen
and pain guaranteed and growing
and love came roaring back.
—JOY LADIN

PSALM 23
A PSALM OF DAVID
Mizmor l’david.

יהוה רעי, לא אחותה.

ADONAI is my shepherd; I shall not want.
Adonai ro-i lo eshar.

becoAt D4.Da, yitirar, yu ni mkmot b’tzalma.
God lays me down in green pastures, leads me to still waters,
BinoD desheh yarbitzeini, al mei m’nubah y’nahaleini.

neshi y’shoveiv, ymanheini v’maglei tzedek l’m’a-an sh’mo.
renews my life, guides me in right paths—for that is God's way.
Nafshi y’shoveiv, yanaleni v’maglei tzedek l’m’a-an sh’mo.

Gam ki eileikh b’gei tzalmavet
Though I walk through a valley as dark as death,
Garm ki eileikh b’gei tzalmavet

la’ira ra ki atah imadi.
I fear no evil, for You are with me;
lo’ira ra ki atah imadi.

sheva’Khole mishanekha heimah y’nahamun.
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
Shiv’t’kha u-mishantekha heimah y’nahamun.

ta’arakh l’fanai shulhan neged tzor’ra.
You spread a table before me in full view of my foes;
Ta’arakh l’fanai shulhan neged tzor’ra.

reshubh va’shemen roshi va’mizkor.
You anoint my head with oil, my cup is overflowing.
Dishanta va-shemen roshi, kosi r’vayah.

akh tov va-’hesed yird’funi kol y’mei hayai.
Only goodness and steadfast love shall pursue me
all the days of my life.
Akh tov va-’hesed yird’funi kol y’mei hayai.

’eshbath be’chet ya’ar la’aladon.
And I shall dwell in the house of ADONAI forever.
V’shavti b’veit Adonai leorekh yamim.
Mourner’s Kaddish

May God’s great name be exalted and hallowed throughout the created world, as is God’s wish. May God’s sovereignty soon be established, in your lifetime and in your days, and in the days of all the house of Israel. And we say: Amen.

May God’s great name be acknowledged forever and ever!

May the name of the Holy One be acknowledged and celebrated, lauded and worshipped, exalted and honored, exalted and acclaimed—though God, who is blessed, b’rikh hu, is truly beyond all acknowledgment and praise, or any expressions of gratitude or consolation ever spoken in the world. And we say: Amen.

May heaven bestow on us, and on all Israel, life and abundant and lasting peace. And we say: Amen.

May the one who creates peace on high bring peace to us and to all Israel [and to all who dwell on earth].

And we say: Amen.

Yitgadal v’yitkadash sh’mei raba, b’alma di v’ra, kiruteih, v’yamlikh malkhuteih b’alma d’kudsha, b’rikh hu, le’ila min kol birkhata v’shirata tushb’ha v’nehamatata da-amiran b’alma, v’imru amen.

Y’hei sh’mei raba min sh’maya v’hayim aleinu v’al kol yisrael, v’imru amen.

Oseh shalom bimromav hu ya-seh shalom aleinu v’al kol yisrael [v’al kol yosh’vei teiveil], v’imru amen.

We are seated.