

Yizkor 5779

I received the classical call before Yom Kippur. I know in advance that that call will come. I picked up the phone and the voice on the other side asked the question I was waiting for: "Rabbi, at what time is YIZKOR?" That question used to have this answer, "Yizkor is after the Haftarah reading and before Mussaf", but this year, the first response that came to my mind was "Yizkor is 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year", I could not believe what came out of my mouth but I was certainly satisfied with my answer, because the presence of the people I love, those who are not physically around anymore, don't have a particular time during services. My magical brief moment of a meaningful response to the that question, was cut short..." yeah Rabbi, of course, I know... BUT, at what time is Yizkor, 11:30- noon?

Zachor, REMEMBER, that's the title of the book that Professor Hayim Yosef Yerushalmi, professor of Jewish Studies at Columbia University wrote two decades ago, claiming that the Jewish people has been the first civilization that wrote history not just as a series of facts but as an interpretation of what those facts mean. The book of Kings and the book of Chronicles, are the 2 biblical books according to Professor Yerushalmi that give testimony of the importance of writing history. The inheritance of that history cultivates our memory and crafts the sense of belonging.

What are memories, how do we build up memories? Do we use a flash drive to store and archive? Where are those files?

Rabbi Bradley Artson teaches that Memory is inherently *constructive*, we remember by rebuilding the past from bits and pieces — and the same ability helps us imagine the future. The hippocampus, long considered the seat of memory in the brain, is actually a “simulator” — the part of the brain responsible for creating movies in the mind, whether they are memories of yesterday, plans for tomorrow, or imaginings from a book or an article we read. In all cases, our minds draw from a store of memory details to build episodes.

Phillip Roth, of blessing memory, wrote “to be alive is to be made of memory”.

Think of memories of your childhood, what brings you back? A playful moment? The smell of a particular food? A melody?

In the neuroplasticity of our brain and through the development of our minds, the people who touched our lives have sculpted us. These are our parents, grandparents, partners, lovers, children, friends, teachers, and mentors. Each one of them has sparked an impact that changed us forever. Each one of them has crafted us in a way that makes them a part of us, a hallmark that we carry with us as long as we exist.

But what happens when someone loses his or her memory?

While I experience the dedication of loved ones to their spouses or beloved parents who don't recognize them anymore I remember this beautiful story:

It was a busy morning, about 8:30, when an elderly gentleman in his 80's arrived at the hospital to have stitches removed from his thumb. He said he was in a hurry as he had

an appointment at 9:00 am. The nurse took his vital signs and had him take a seat, knowing it would be over an hour before someone would be able to see him. I saw him looking at his watch and decided, since I was not busy with another patient, I would evaluate his wound. On exam, it was well healed, so I talked to one of the doctors, got the needed supplies to remove his sutures and redress his wound. While taking care of his wound, I asked him if he had another doctor's appointment this morning, as he was in such a hurry. The gentleman told me no, that he needed to go to the nursing home to eat breakfast with his wife. I inquired as to her health. He told me that she had been there for a while and that she was a victim of Alzheimer's Disease. As we talked, I asked if she would be upset if he was a bit late. He replied that she no longer knew who he was, that she had not recognized him in five years now. I was surprised, and asked him, 'And you still go every morning, even though she doesn't know who you are?' He smiled as he patted my hand and said, 'She doesn't know me, but I still know who she is.'

Memories, the source of immortality...

After my mom passed away a short time after my dad died, I closed the apartment they lived in for almost 40 years, you have heard the story that I packed all the pictures and all the letters, I packed those postcards from Europe who stopped coming to Argentina in 1943 when 1/3 of the family was murdered in concentration camps. I packed what I thought will carry the memories *me dor l'dor*, from one generation to the next. When I sat on the plane, taking off from Buenos Aires, that 4th day of Passover, April 27 2016, I came to the realization that I was an orphan and that "safe heaven" of the little child in me was taken away forever, vanished. It did not matter that I was 49 years old, and that

I was coming home to Atlanta to a loving husband, two beautiful and supportive daughters and an incredible community. At that moment as the plane was taking off, I wanted to fly up to the sky and give to mom and dad one last kiss.

Interestingly enough, as time elapses, the salty tears that run through my face in the first years become a smile filled with treasured memories, and today I can see both of them sitting there on the front row, next to each other, holding hands as they did for 52 years.

Judaism is built on premises of kehillah, community. When we come to Shul, we come here not to be alone, we come here to be with each other and also, we come here to be with our love ones, those who left that treasured memory. They are here. They don't hug us with their arms anymore. But take a moment and feel their presence.

Can you feel it?

Isaac Bashevis Singer, the great Yiddish novelist, wrote, when a person who is closed to you dies, in the first few weeks after that person's death he or she is far from you as a near person can ever be but with the passing of time this person becomes nearer and nearer and then you can almost live with that person as if they become a part of you.

Let me review my answer to the phone call, "At What time is Yizkor, Rabbi?" YEP. Yizkor is 24/7 x365, at any time, because as long as we remember our love ones live. They live in our values, they live in our mentschkeyt, they live in our thoughts, they live in the difficult decisions we might confront, they live in our parenting style, they live in our

mentoring style, they hear our voices and cries through our pillow when we go to sleep after a hard day, they rejoice with our laughter after a joyful day.

There is a presence that transcends physical life, there is an immanent presence that holds us and stays by our side.

They live as long as we remember. When we feel alone or lonely they live as long as we cultivate memories. They live with us and in us. If you like close your eyes, and bring your love one or love ones here, try to feel that hug, that trip, the laughter, the bike ride, the shared meal, the long table of Passover, the sound of the crystal glass setting up the table, the special cutlery for holidays or Shabbat, the blessing of a collective Sheecheyanu. If you are able to connect to this moment and their presence, please say THANK YOU. Be grateful for the what they have done for you. Be forgiving for any wrong they might have made or wrongs you have done towards them Be present to acknowledge their presence and if you can, please smile at them. And now, open your eyes.

In the physical world, we are marked by time and space but in the spiritual world, in the heart, in the mind, in the soul, there is no distance and not separation of space, you can close your eyes and you can imagine you are in the place you want to be, there, transcending time and generations, that moment allows us to bring whomever we want to kiss, there up in heavens even if it is for the last time.

Abba Kovner, Israeli poet:

In that chain of love

Linking the generations,

We are never alone.

In the hall of mirrors

Those who have gone before

Are illumined by our light

They alone have left me

They alone are still faithful

For now, death cannot do more to them

At the bend of the road

At the close of the day

They gather around me silently

And they walk by my side

This is a bond nothing could ever break

What I have lost, what I possess

FOREVER.

In a few minutes, we will raise for Yizkor, a short 10-15' service that we do 4 times a year, generation after generation, writing our own history, such a **short service that lasts for an eternity**. May all those who will come to sit next to each one of us, those

who come to hug us, those who come to kiss our lips, those who come to embrace our memories, be always remembered for blessings. Amen.