

Yizkor: Remember

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Rabbi Allison Vann

Suburban Temple- Kol Ami

During Yizkor we formally remember our loved ones that are no longer with us. We are thinking of our mother, father, husband, wife, sister, brother, cousin, friend, aunt, uncle.... during this hour. Their memories are with us often during the High Holy Days.

It was with this in mind that I chose the movie Coco for Selihot, the service that formally begins the High Holy Day season. On September 1—which feels like so long ago, we

watched the movie, enjoyed a brief conversation, and changed our Torah covers to white.

The visually stunning Pixar movie explores family, death, and forgiveness using the lens of Mexican culture. In particular, Miguel, the young protagonist learns the importance of remembering family, generation after generation.

A quick summary will be helpful. Without giving too much of the plot away, Miguel and his family are preparing for Dia De los Muertos, Day of the Dead, during which they believe deceased loved ones come from the afterlife to visit their living family.

To show their love, families prepare ofrendas, altars, in their homes, displaying pictures of the family member,

beloved mementos, and favorite foods. The ofrendas are specially decorated for Dia De Los Muertes.

Miguel, upset because his family does not support his dream of becoming a musician, ends up in the afterworld with his deceased family. While there, he learns many lessons about remembering. In particular, he learns what happens when a person is forgotten—they disappear even from the afterlife.

As he comes to understand the importance of remembering, he recognizes that he, too, must play a role in helping to make sure memories remain.

Finally returned to the living world, Miguel is terrified that his great-grandmother, Coco, is at risk of forgetting her Papa. This means that he would disappear forever.

Desperate, he sings her a song, Remember Me. The Oscar winning ballad from the movie reads in part:

Though I have to say goodbye

Remember me

Don't let it make you cry

For ever if I'm far away

I hold you in my heart

I sing a secret song to you

Each night we are apart

Remember me

Though I have to travel far

Remember me

Each time you hear a sad guitar

Know that I'm with you

The only way that I can be

Remember me

If you close your eyes and let the music play

Keep our love alive, I'll never fade away.

The song succeeds --she sang with Miguel, remembering.

Coco, his great grandmother, who hadn't spoken a word in months--began to recount stories of her father. Together, Papa's memories were safe, in her heart—and now, passed safely to Miguel's.

A beautiful movie, fully embracing Mexican culture, I could not help but think of the beauty, and meaning of Jewish

memorial rituals, and the importance, that we too, place on memory.

Our ofrenda is a yahrzeit candle in our kitchen. When we light it, we may remember our husband, and every time we see the flickering flame, dancing in the glass jar for 24 hours, a memory is evoked. Perhaps we recall a sweet story about a particular kindness; or a funny moment about a shared joke. The flame is a testament to memory.

Our ofrenda is hearing our loved one's name during the recitation of the kaddish list, and the snapshot of a beloved face that enters our minds eye, as if our mother, or father is sitting right next to us. Or when we hear the name of a favorite aunt or uncle, and we are washed with warmth,

remembering the cozy feelings every time we were near them.

Our ofrenda is when we bestow upon our children the name of our loved one, now deceased. How magnificent it is when they hear the stories of their grandfather, their grandmother, their aunt, uncle—and they make them their own stories.

These rituals are our ofrenda. Like the ofrenda, they help us honor memory, help it continue, generation to generation. With these rituals, we pass memories down, generation to generation, with meaning and value.

As Rabbi Jack Riemer wrote:

At the rising sun and at its going down;

We remember them.

At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter; We
remember them.

At the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring; We
remember them.

At the blueness of the skies and in the warmth of summer;
We remember them.

At the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of the
autumn; We remember them.

At the beginning of the year and when it ends; We
remember them.

As long as we live, they too will live, for they are now a part
of us.