

**YKII**

**Har Shalom**

**2021**

**A little swatch of cloth**

I never thought I would say this, but this past year became the year that I was afraid to turn on the television! I love TV, for me it is a great escape, but this past year, with everything going on, I was actually afraid to turn on the TV!! What was going to happen next, right? Pandemic, floods, riots, hate, anti-semitism, heat, war, famine, and the list goes on and on ...I think all that was missing was earth being hit by a meteor! NOT turning on the TV was the great escape!!

But, on February 13<sup>th</sup> of this year, I was glued to the TV with an event that had me transfixed to the screen and me holding my breath. Do you remember that day? I will never forget it.

On July 30<sup>th</sup> of last year, the Mars rover Perseverance was propelled into space via an Atlas V launch vehicle. Perseverance soon began making its way to the Red Planet, and on February 13<sup>th</sup> of this year, Perseverance, landed on Mars at 3:55 p.m. Eastern Time.

When Perseverance was launched last year, it was not assured that the rover would ever make it to the surface of Mars. It was a harrowing final seven minutes as Perseverance entered the atmosphere of Mars and descended to the planet's surface, while mission control waited for news of an arrival or a disaster.

Although there have been other successful missions to and landings on Mars, Perseverance is the first vehicle equipped to assess whether life has ever existed on Mars.

This little rover had been sent into a wilderness land.

Perseverance and its companion helicopter **Ingenuity** would venture into a strange place with a difficult terrain, and extreme weather conditions. The space vehicles that are now on Mars are equipped to withstand bitterly cold temperatures and conditions unlike anything on Earth. Perseverance and Ingenuity will trek into lonely territory where no life appears to exist, guided only by a space center some 128 million miles away.

Propelled from the hospitable conditions of Earth into a wild, foreign land, this Mars mission is in search of life in a place that seems to have none. And the question remains whether this wilderness will ever be able to sustain human missions.

Journeys into the wilderness, whatever they may be, are not for the faint of heart. Most people try to avoid them. We have been

told that the wilderness is a dangerous place. No one wants to be stranded in a wild place, left out in the cold or heat with no provisions. We all know how such stories usually end. But Perseverance and Ingenuity are out there....as we say in the Navy **“alone and unafraid”**, in the wilderness of Mars.

But while these two machines are full of experiments and tools to help them in their mission, **Ingenuity** in particular, carries with it something special. You see, the first flight of the little Martian helicopter Ingenuity is the first ever controlled and powered flight on any planet beyond earth. The rocket scientists at JPL called it a **“Wright Brother’s moment!!”**

And so to celebrate the first ever flight in the wilderness of Mars, Ingenuity’s team fastened a small swatch of fabric from the original 1903 Wright Flyer to the underside of the helicopter’s

solar panel. And on April 19, 2021, three days after Wilbur Wright's 154th birthday, that relic of humanity's first airplane lifted off from Mars. A small swatch of the past, to celebrate, inspire and connect yesterday to today!

Looking back at my journey through the different wilderness' of life, I see some were terrifying, some uplifting, some sad and some happy. The wildernesses of life are indeed scary. One can easily become lost in such places. But I can also look at the wilderness times of my life and see little swatches not of cloth but of memories that have inspired me, guided me and have given me strength and comfort to carry on, and survive the wilderness.

Every single one of us here, especially at this point in our service, before we begin the chanting of Yizkor, the Memorial service, can probably look back at long gone relatives, parents, friends, and

teachers whose little swatches of memory allowed us to not only survive those difficult “wilderness movements” of our life, but to even thrive in them, learn from them and come out better people.

The little swatches of memories embedded in our hearts by those we remember today, link us to a wisdom of the past, connect us to a love of those who have gone before us, and make us realize that we are but a link in the chain of past and future generations.

And much like the helicopter Ingenuity reminds us that we have an obligation and burden to be the inspiration, the help, the wisdom of those who will come after us. In the not too distant future, children will ask us “What did you do during the pandemic? How did you help others? Were you part of the solution or part of the problem?” And same for every other calamity that has befallen us this year.

Yizkor is not only a time to remember loved ones long gone, it is also a time for us to reflect how WE are going to be remembered, will we be a swatch of memory for others to be inspired by, to be elevated by, to be guided by?

The name of the Mars rover is apt, Perseverance, because in the most forsaken and desolate of places, nothing short of perseverance will lead to the discovery of life. And it might be that in the most unlikely places, the seeds of life are found hiding under a rock.

So, too, for us, the wildernesses of our lives should not be a place to be feared or avoided. It is a place where we can be changed and where we can find life. Inspired by those little swatches of memory we carry with us.

If we persevere in the wilderness of life and, like the Mars rover, overturn a rock or two, we might find that the rivers of memory we find stand ready to nourish us so that we can not only survive there but flourish as people and as Jews.