

Mother Died Today:

Lessons Learned From My Mother-in-Law, Nusha Wyner z"l

Updated September 24, 2017

"Mother died today." These are the 3 words with which the English translation of Albert Camus' French novel, The Stranger, begins. These are also the 3 words with which Rabbi Alan Lew z"l began a sermon that he delivered in San Francisco in 2004, about a month after his own mother died. In commenting on the opening words of The Stranger, Rabbi Lew said, "Mother died today."... This shockingly stark and matter-of-fact announcement is a perfect introduction to the emotionally dead and existentially disillusioned consciousness of the novel's narrator, Mersault. I guess I'm not a very good existentialist.... Even though [my own mother] was 85 years old and had suffered horribly from Alzheimer's for many years, I found her death to be one of the most gut-wrenching emotional experiences I have ever been through."

While no two people react exactly the same to the death of a loved one, I would daresay that more people tend to react like Rabbi Lew than like Albert Camus' protagonist. As for conveying the news of a death to others, the average person would probably not just come right out and say so matter-of-factly, "My mother died today" or "My wife died today" or "My brother died today." Unfortunately, as a rabbi, I am often in the position of conveying the news of the death of a synagogue member or a congregant's relative to the rest of the TBA community. Regardless of how I personally might be feeling inside, I am in the unenviable position of having to put the announcement in writing in an email. And, I'm sure that some of these emails have come across as matter-of-fact, even when I begin with words, "I am saddened to announce the death of...."

Reflecting back on 5777, this past year was one in which I sent out a record number of death announcements to our congregation: 33 to be exact. Whereas in previous years at TBA, I did between 5-7 funerals a year, this past year, I officiated at **13 funerals** and arranged **shiva** minyans at the homes of **19 congregants**. It seemed like not a week went by without my sending out an announcement of a death and/or shiva minyans.

And, in addition to Temple Beth Ahm funerals, I also attended funerals and/or shiva minyanim for the **parents of 11 close friends** of mine and Adi's.

But this past year, 5777, was especially sad, not only because of the sheer number of deaths that I sent or received announcements about, but also because of how much I was personally affected by some of them. Most notably, my family and I were saddened beyond words by the passing of **my mother-in-law, Nusha Wyner**, who died just 3 days after Yom Kippur last year: on the 13th of Tishrei 5777. Although Nusha had been diagnosed with uterine cancer 6 years ago, the same summer when I first became the rabbi of Temple Beth Ahm, the reality of just how close she was to the end of her life did not become palpable until Adi chanted *Unetaneh Tokef* during last year's High Holidays services. The most familiar words of this Musaf prayer are:

"B'Rosh HaShanah yikatevun u-v'Yom Tzom Kippur y'chatemun,"

"On Rosh Hashanah it shall be written & on Yom Kippur it shall be sealed.... who shall live and who shall die." "Mi yichyeh u-mi yamut."

When Adi chanted these words on this bimah last Rosh HaShanah, they virtually stuck in this throat. His eyes welled up with tears as he paused and looked over at **the place in shul where his mom should have been sitting**: the place where she sat every year on the High Holidays & at least a couple of Shabbatot every month since Adi began leading services at Temple Beth Ahm and Nusha became a member of this congregation. And, even before Adi became the High Holidays cantor of this shul, you should know that Nusha attended almost every single High Holidays service that Adi ever led, no matter where it was: whether it was in the Philadelphia suburbs or Brooklyn or San Francisco.

So, last Rosh HaShanah, as Adi looked over there (POINT), these words resonated especially strongly, because he sensed that his mother's life was hanging in the balance between life and death. And sure enough, the doctors soon informed her (and us) that there was nothing else that could be done to cure her, at which point she transitioned to hospice care.

Nusha's first yahrzeit begins this Monday night. God willing, Adi will recite Mourner's Kaddish for his mom in Jerusalem this Monday and Tuesday, & Rivkah & I will be by his side.

On the occasion of Nusha's first yahrzeit and today's Yom Kippur Yizkor memorial service, I would like to share with you some lessons learned from my mother-in-law that are applicable beyond the family and that are particularly relevant during this High Holidays season:

(1) One of the most valuable lessons that we can learn from Nusha Wyner is embodied in a remarkable statement that she made on her deathbed at the age of 75. As one of the few child survivors of the Holocaust, she said, "**I am lucky. I've lived 73 more years than I should have.**" Wow. If ever there was a statement that encapsulates Nusha's **positive outlook** on life and being grateful thankful for what she had, that statement says it all.

(2) SKIP: On a lighter note, one of Nusha's favorite Hebrew maxims to quote was, "***Im taam va-rayach, eyn mah l'hitvakeach.***" Literally, this means, "When it comes to matters of taste and smell, there is nothing to dispute about." This is the Hebrew equivalent of the Latin saying, "*De gustibus non disputandum est.*" The phrase is most commonly rendered in English as, "**There is no accounting for taste.**" In other words, "**Personal preferences are not debatable.**" I first heard Nusha cite this Hebrew saying when she and I had a difference of opinion about whether or not the bridesmaids at the Malik-Wyner wedding should all wear the same color or style. In later years, she applied this saying to 'debates' such as: "What tastes better? White meat or dark meat?" and "What's the best melody to Adon Olam?"

She also applied this quote to debates regarding "the best part of holiday and Shabbat services." While Nusha's favorite parts of coming to shul included socializing at the Kiddush and reading the Torah portion in English with commentaries while it was being chanted in Hebrew, she acknowledged and appreciated that there were others who preferred different aspects of the Shabbos morning shul experience. She respected the fact that some people most enjoyed the congregational singing, while others preferred talking to their friends after (or during) services. She respected the fact that some people came to shul early, while others came late. She respected the fact that some people came to shul JFK (Just For the Kiddush or Just For Kaddish). And she even respected the fact that, for some people, their favorite part of services was when they finished! As opinionated and forthcoming as she was about everything from religion to politics to food, Nusha really did believe that there was truth to the saying, "*Im taam va-rayach, eyn mah l'hitvakeach.*" "**Personal preferences are not debatable.**"

(3) Another one of Nusha's favorite sayings was "***Ahm Yisrael Chai.***" "**The nation of Israel lives forever.**" My mother-in-law viewed Judaism as a nationality, as well as a religion, and she believed that, as Jews, it is important for us to do our part to **ensure the survival of the Jewish people from one generation to the next.** This imperative might have been especially important to her because she was a Holocaust survivor, as well as a proud descendant of the Pones family, who had been expelled from Spain in the 15th century. Rather than granting Hitler or King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella a posthumous victory, Nusha felt it was important to declare "*Ahm Yisrael Chai*", not only in words, but also in our actions.

Having children and raising them with Jewish traditions was a top priority for her, and she made sure to make her opinion known to her children and their spouses. She certainly didn't waste any time conveying her message to me about the Jewish imperative to have children, a message that she conveyed to us from the moment we got engaged. It is Nusha's emphasis on Jewish family life and its role in perpetuating Jewish peoplehood that is reflected on the quote by A.D. Gordon that is being inscribed on her tombstone: **"B'li chayeish mishpacha, lo yibaneh ahm."**

"Without family life, no nation can be made."

For Nusha, the saying, "*Ahm Yisrael Chai*," was also an expression of her love for the land & people of Israel. She firmly believed in the importance of supporting Israel: most importantly, by going there and spending time there, but also by giving tzedakah to Israeli causes and to organizations in the United States that advocate for Israel (such as CAMERA). Again, being a Holocaust survivor influenced Nusha's values; it made her an especially strong advocate of Israel. She knew, from her own experience and that of her family's, that Jews need a place to go when they encounter anti-Semitism in other parts of the world. If the State of Israel had existed during the Shoah, thousands, if not millions, of Jewish lives could have been saved.

Now, you should know, just because Nusha loved Israel, that doesn't mean she only had positive things to say about the Israeli government and society. She was especially critical of the Orthodox establishment's monopoly over certain aspects of Jewish life, the Chief Rabbinate's stranglehold on the Jewish State, and the Haredi political parties' unreasonable pressure on Bibi Netanyahu & previous prime ministers. She was thrilled when the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) approved a proposal in **January of 2016** to create a permanent and well-maintained space for pluralistic and egalitarian prayer at the **Kotel** that would receive federal funding. According to this agreement, Jews of all denominations would have unrestricted access to the Southern Plaza of the Kotel as an egalitarian prayer space, presided over by a governing body comprised of representatives from the Jewish Agency, Women of the Wall, and the Masorti/Conservative and Reform movements in Israel.

The Israeli government also agreed to expand this new prayer space and to provide an entrance and 24/7 accessibility through the same gate as the Northern Plaza, with equal visibility to the public as the existing Orthodox men's & women's sections. In other words, the Kotel agreement of January 2016 was not aimed at getting rid of the Orthodox prayer spaces that are separated by gender; it was aimed at expanding the area to include a third prayer space for mixed-gender davening, allowing for women to lead services and have public Torah readings (which is not permitted in the women's section of the current Kotel set-up)./ In the words of a statement that was released on **January 31, 2016** by leaders of the Masorti organization in Israel, as well as the USCJ & and Rabbinical Assembly in North America, "[this] decision brings us measurably closer to the simple, basic fact that there is **more than one way to be Jewish** and that there should be **"One Wall for One People."** The Kotel agreement was hailed as a groundbreaking event in religious relations in Israel, **proving that compromise could be reached between diverse groups and different interests in the Jewish community**. In the words of the American Conservative Rabbi, Gordon Tucker, **"The agreement signaled that all Jews are welcome in Israel. As equals. Not just tolerated. But embraced."** At the time, leaders of the Masorti, Conservative, and Reform movements were ecstatic; and they were hopeful about the implementation of this agreement, which was voted and approved by a vote of 15-5 as an **official Israeli government resolution. (PAUSE)**

Fast forward to this past summer. In **June of 2017**, the Israeli government, pressured by ultra-Orthodox members of PM Bibi Netanyahu's coalition, formally **tabled the Kotel agreement** of January 2016.

The government's renegeing on the Kotel agreement was not the only blow to religious pluralism in Israel this summer. In addition, the Knesset Legislative Committee moved a bill forward that would grant the ultra-Orthodox Rabbanut sole authority to do **conversions**-to-Judaism in Israel. Effectively, that means that no Conservative & Reform conversions would be recognized by the government and that most Orthodox conversions performed in America by people who are not on the Israeli Rabbinat's list of approved rabbis would also not be recognized. I daresay that if Nusha would have lived to hear the news this past June of the Israel's government's renegeing on its previous commitments to the non-Orthodox segments of Jewish society, it would have aggravated her to no end.

However, no matter how much it might have bothered her and how much she might have complained about this blow to religious pluralism in Israel, Nusha's support of Israel and her proud espousing of "**Ahm Yisrael Chai**" philosophy would not have wavered. Not one bit. For Nusha, there was and is a difference between legitimate criticism of Israel vs. out-of-bounds critique.

Natan Sharansky has spoken and written about the **3D's** for differentiating between **acceptable criticism of Israel** and **unacceptable criticism of Israel**. According to Sharansky, unacceptable criticism of Israel is that which **demonizes** Israel, applies a **double** standard to Israel, and **de**-legitimizes the very existence of Israel as a Jewish State. This is the kind of anti-Zionist rhetoric that is just a form of anti-Semitism in disguise. For Nusha, as for me and Natan Sharansky, it is OK to criticize Israel, but it is **not OK** to question the very right for Israel to exist.

As disappointed as Nusha might have been about the anti-pluralism developments in Israel this past June, I believe that she would have been appalled that so many Jews have recently threatened to withdraw their support of Israel because of the Israeli government's kowtowing to Orthodox pressure and/or because they believe that Israel is an '**apartheid state**' and view Israeli as an 'oppressor' in the Middle East. As a graduate of Columbia's sister school, Barnard, and the grandmother (Savta) of a current Columbia student, Nusha would have also been appalled to see the Apartheid Wall set up on Columbia University's campus this past spring, with Apartheid Week events coordinated by anti-Israel Jews, as well as by anti-Israel non-Jews. As a Holocaust survivor, Nusha would not have been surprised by the anti-Semitism of neo-Nazis and other '**alt right**' activists, such as those who protested the removal of the Robert E. Lee statue from a public park in **Charlottesville** this past summer. However, she was absolutely disgusted by the anti-Semitism expressed by **self-righteous leftists**, including those who kicked out three lesbian women carrying Jewish pride flags (rainbow flags embossed with a Jewish Star) at the **Dyke March in Chicago** this past June. She would have been outraged to find out that the march's organizers felt justified in banning these flags on the grounds that they were a "trigger" that made some people "feel unsafe" because of the Jewish star's association with Israel.

(SKIP: quote from Jonathan Tobin article on Mengele & Charlottesville re: anti-Semitism on the left & right?)

Had Nusha been on Columbia's campus during the week of anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic rhetoric, and encountered some of the self-righteous self-hating Jews who were involved in Apartheid Week, I can just imagine her walking right up to some of these students, proudly proclaiming "*Ahm Yisrael Chai!*"

(4) SKIP: Another one of Nusha's values that has relevance beyond the Malik-Wyners is **the value of being present** for your **family**. Nusha had the *z'chut* (privilege) of seeing all 4 of her children graduate from high school, college, and graduate school. And when I say, "seeing," I literally mean "seeing." She never missed the graduation of a child or grandchild. And she also had the *z'chut* of walking all 4 of her kids down the aisle at their wedding ceremonies, and of being present at the *bris*, *brit bat*, and/or baby naming ceremonies of her grandchildren, whether they were in NJ, NY, PA, MA, or CA.

Nusha did her best **not to miss any of the major events in her grandchildren's lives, even after she was diagnosed with cancer**. It wasn't just the birth and graduation ceremonies that she attended; she also came to basketball games, plays, music recitals, concerts, & even 'less significant' events such as Kabbalat Siddur ceremonies and other school assemblies. And of course, all of us were able to count on Savta for babysitting the grandchildren, even if it involved sleeping over for a few days while we were out of town. Nusha also reveled in **big family gatherings** such as Thanksgiving and the annual trip to Ocean City, NJ. (This was the first summer when she wasn't with us.)

Undoubtedly, there are many of you who also place a high value of family. I am so impressed by those of you who constantly fly back and forth to various locales to visit your grandchildren: not just for occasions like Bar/Bat Mitzvah, but also 'just because.' Unfortunately, there are still so many of us do not go out of our way to see our out-of-town relatives as often as we can. If you are one of those people, the New Year is the perfect time to reconsider your attitude and your approach to family gatherings. Rather than shying away from the inconvenience of attending a grandchild's school assembly or a cousin's wedding, find a way to make it work. As Nusha used to say, "**Never miss a family simcha.**"

(5) The final set of lessons that I learned from my mother-in-law, Nusha, are ones that are corollaries of a phrase that she coined. The **Nusha-ism** to which I refer is "**creeping standism.**" By this, Nusha meant "the tendency to stand for more parts of a Jewish prayer service than are necessary or required." For example, she objected to the practice of standing for the first 2 blessings of the Amidah repetition when it is only necessary to stand up for the 3rd blessing, known as "Kedushah." Nusha also objected to the practice of standing for every Kaddish. While she agreed that one should, if health permits, stand for the Mourner's Kaddish (if and only if you are mourning the death of a close relative), she strongly opposed the "creeping standism" that leads some individuals and some communities to stand for every single Chatzi Kaddish & Kaddish Shalem, or to stand for Mourner's Kaddish when you aren't mourning.

(SKIP) Now, before I tell you how I feel about “creeping standism”, you need to know something about Nusha’s overall philosophy about Jewish laws, customs, and traditions. Unlike me, Nusha’s attitude towards “*halacha*” (or “Jewish law”) can be summed in the following 3 words, “**Too many rules.**” Even though the Hebrew word “*mitzvah*” means “commandment”, indicating that there are certain obligations and responsibilities that we have as members of the Jewish community, Nusha did not like to be commanded by anyone or anything. While she had a great respect for & love of Jewish customs, she didn’t like to be told what to do: not by God, not by rabbis, & not by any communal standards. Nusha was more of a proponent of “*minhag*” (custom) than “*halacha*” (law); she was also more of a proponent of “**individual choice**” than of “*community minhag*.” In this sense, she was more philosophically aligned with the Reform Movement than with the Conservative Movement. Let’s just say that Nusha and I didn’t quite see eye to eye on the issues of *mitzvah*, *halacha*, & communal customs; we certainly disagreed about the importance of “*chiyuv*” (obligation) in Jewish tradition. Yet, despite our differences of opinion, Nusha & I agreed to disagree... and she even became a member of Temple Beth Ahm, despite the fact that this congregation has a rabbi who does believe in the importance of responsibility and the notion of commanded-ness.

As far as “**creeping standism**” is concerned, where do I personally stand, so to speak? (No pun intended.) In some respects, I agree with Nusha’s opposition to unnecessary standing. It should go without saying that I don’t think you are EVER required to stand if you have a **health condition** that makes it difficult for you to stand or to get up & sit down repeatedly. But, assuming that your health is NOT an obstacle, I believe that we should stand whenever the **ark is opened** or the Torah scrolls are being lifted or carried around. We are also required to stand (with our feet together) for the **Kedushah** prayer during the repetition of the Amidah (*Chazarat ha-Shatz*). And, if you are healthy and in a space that is conducive to standing (as opposed to say, being on a train), you should also stand for the **Silent Amidah**. After all, the Hebrew word “*Amidah*” literally means, “the act of standing” or “the standing prayer.”

As for the parts of the service where **standing is optional** rather than required, Jewish law does NOT obligate us to stand during the repetition of the Amidah for any of the **blessings aside from the Kedushah**. Likewise, we are NOT halachically mandated to stand **for each and every Kaddish**.

When I first joined **Temple Beth Ahm**, I was informed, “Here at TBA, we stand for every Kaddish & and we stand for the first 3 blessings of the Amidah.” To me, that meant that this community’s long-standing custom must have been, from time immemorial, to stand for these prayers. Of course, I wanted to be respectful of TBA’s communal customs, so I used to make a point of announcing from the bimah, “Please rise for such-and-such prayer on page xyz” for every Kaddish.

But, within the past year, I found out that this was NOT the custom from the days the shul was founded over 50 years ago.. that standing for every Kaddish was a relatively recent innovation in the life of this congregation. I also came to realize that TBA was very much a **“when in doubt, stand” congregation**. If halacha requires that you stand, you stand. And if it’s just a minhag to stand, you also stand. Perhaps it took Nusha’s death for me to realize that she had a point with her “creeping standism” critique....and that I myself didn’t feel so comfortable with saying, “Please rise,” when Jewish law doesn’t require us to stand. It wasn’t until after Nusha’s death that I shared my discomfort with the overuse of the rabbi’s “Please rise” announcement during services. And that is why, you may have noticed, that before Kaddish and some other prayers, I no longer say, “Please rise.” Either I don’t say anything or I say, **“If it is your custom to rise, please rise. Otherwise, feel free to remain seated.”**

When I first started using this introductory phrase during services on Shabbat, the looks on some people’s faces reflected discomfort with the idea of some people standing and others sitting. Many people just wanted to be told what to do by the rabbi & they seemed to want everyone to follow a **uniform practice** when it came to standing.

But, guess what? What has been the custom of Jewish communities from time immemorial is to have variation among congregants, even while adhering to some uniform communal practices. While there may be uniform kashrut standards that everyone must follow when bringing food into the synagogue for consumption by all members of our community, it is understood and accepted that the kashrut standards for individual congregants will vary from one person to the next in his home or in restaurants. Likewise, it is OK for individual congregants to have different practices when it comes to sitting and standing during services.

In fact, the entire **Jewish davening experience** is meant to encourage an **interplay between the individual and the community**. For many prayers, there are some parts that the cantor or other leader chants as a solo, other parts that are meant to involve the entire congregation (often in the form of a congregational melody), and yet other parts that are meant to be recited by individual congregants at their own individual pace.

The interplay between the individual and the communal aspects of davening is most pronounced during the *Kedushah* prayer; there are certain parts that are meant to be chanted solo by the cantor, other parts that are meant to be sung by the congregation in unison with or in harmony with the cantor, and yet other parts that are meant to be audibly mumbled in a low undertone by congregants, each at our own individual pace.

During most parts of the service that are introduced as 'silent' (i.e. all prayers aside from the Silent Amidah), the ideal is for congregants to audibly mumble the words at their own pace. But during our recitation of the Silent Amidah, the model of prayer we are supposed to emulate is Hannah, who is featured in the Haftarah on the first day of Rosh HaShanah. Like Hannah, we are supposed to move our lips as we softly whisper the words of the Silent Amidah. Moving our lips provides us with a much more active prayer experience than merely reading the prayers with our eyes. This practice reflects the Jewish ideal of **having an active individual role within the communal prayer experience**.

During the recitation of the Silent Amidah, it is not expected for each and every person to finish at the same time. Some people recite the Hebrew, while others recite the English. And regardless of which language is used, some people recite more slowly than others. It is perfectly acceptable for different people to **be on different pages** of the Machzor/ Siddur, not only during the Amidah, but during other prayers as well.

For most prayers, it is also perfectly acceptable to **skip some words on the page**. Rather than attempting to recite all of the words on the page and missing the entire point of what you are saying, consider concentrating on a just a few words or prayers on the page, immersing yourself fully in those words or prayers with *kavannah* (intentional mindfulness).

And, guess what? It is even acceptable to be in a **totally different book** than others during services. While others are singing or silently reciting the words in the prayer book, it's OK for you to read another book to make your High Holidays experience more meaningful or relevant. If you don't like the translations in this Machzor that we have (I'll admit that I don't), bring a different Machzor that has ones that you do like or a Machzor that has commentaries, which this one lacks. One of the main reasons we replaced Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat with the Conservative Movement's new siddur, Lev Shalem, is because it includes many commentaries on the sides that range from poetic musings to historical insights about individual prayers. While the prayer leader is chanting the prayers on Shabbat and some congregants are singing along, others may feel more comfortable reading these commentaries.. and that is perfectly acceptable. While our High Holidays Machzor doesn't offer this opportunity, you are encouraged to read selections from the supplement that I provided or bring a book of your own to shul, whether it's Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins' collection of Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur readings, or another book of 'Jewish interest.' Anything is better than just sitting there & being lost or bored.

Just as **being part of a community** does not mean that we all have to **stand or sit in unison** for each and every prayer, being part of a community also doesn't mean that each and every individual has to **be on the same page**, or **even in the same book**.

Now, having said that, if at any point, you feel yourself wanting to be on the same page in the same book as others, just look at the page number flipper at the front of the sanctuary. Or, better yet, **turn to the person next to you, in front of you, or behind you**, and ask that person where we are. In fact, I think it is preferable to ask your neighbor than to rely on the rabbi's page number flipper or verbal announcement. The reason being is a lesson that is a corollary of Nusha's "creeping standism" critique: **Interdependence among members of the community is a Jewish value**. It is better to turn to other members of the community for assistance and support than to always depend just on the rabbi. As much as I may have a vested interest in your depending on me as your spiritual leader, as flattered as I might be by your viewing me as indispensable, it is important for you to **become more empowered and connected to each other**.

These values are important, not only if you are trying to figure out the page number in the prayer book & whether to stand or sit for a particular prayer, but also in other contexts outside of services. **For a community to truly feel like a community**, it is important that you **reach out to each other & be there for each other** in times of illness & mourning, as well as in times of joyous lifecycle events and to help meet ongoing communal needs. The *Mi SheBerach* list of people in the extended TBA community who are in need of physical and spiritual healing is over 5 pages long; while it would be physically impossible for me, as the rabbi, to make a **Bikkur Cholim visit** each and every person who is ill, it is possible for every person on the list to be contacted (if not visited) if other members of the community step up to do some of these visits. And some of you do. Whether you regularly visit some of the local hospitals or visit and arrange rides for those who are unable to drive, you are doing a mitzvah and fulfilling your responsibility as a member of this community.

SKIP: Interdependence among members of a community is a Jewish value that is illustrated by the following story: **Three Times Chai** re: making your own heaven vs hell with people in heaven helping each other out by feeding each other with wooden spoons attached to arms

The value of **communal interdependence** was [also] in evidence countless times over this past year when our community experienced an unprecedented number of deaths. As you may recall, I sent many congregational emails to recruit people for minyan at the shul or in congregants' homes during shiva. There was one week in August, when I must have sent 3 emails with these mitzvah opportunities (it was a week when there had been more than one death in the congregation AND several of our minyan regulars were out of town). Thankfully, we were able to make a minyan each and every time I tried to organize one. **Ivan Sokoloff**, who is often one of the first to volunteer for these mitzvah opportunities with his wife Carol, sent me the following email on August 14, following a Shabbat Mincha that had 18 people in attendance, "I was just wondering if you realize that your e-mails are more effective than the President's tweets!" Thanks for the kudos, Ivan, but I don't think that our ability to make a minyan on that occasion was as much a testament to my emails as it was to your and Carol's and other **congregants' sense of mutual responsibility** for other members of the Temple Beth Ahm community.

As we gather together today for Yizkor on Yom Kippur, let's harness this feeling of **mutual responsibility** to make this service as meaningful as possible. Like so many other parts of today's services, Yizkor features an **interplay between the individual and the community**. There will be parts of Yizkor that you will be asked to recite **individually**, on your own, at your own pace, those "Yizkor" paragraphs in which each of us will have the opportunity to invoke the particular names of the loved ones we are remembering today. And yet, we will be reciting these individualized parts of Yizkor while **standing alongside each other as a community**. Our sense of community should be further enhanced by some of the English, Hebrew, & Aramaic selections that we will recite in unison together, culminating in the Mourner's Kaddish. As we remember our loved ones, may we be reminded of the importance of the Jewish values of **communal interdependence & mutual responsibility**.

As we continue standing alongside each other as a community on this Yom Kippur and throughout the year, may we all consider the **lessons to be learned** from my mother-in-law, Nusha Wyner z"l, as well as the **impact** that your loved ones have made on all of you, and the **lasting legacy** that all of our loved ones leave behind for us to carry on and transmit from generation to generation.

Ken yehi ratzon & Gmar Chatimah Tovah.