

## Yizkor – Yom Kippur 5776

On Yom Kippur afternoon, the neighborhood playground, in which almost no one ever played because it was so decrepit, was a happening place. At least a dozen kids, hangers-on who had made it that late into the day, were banished by their parents to the lot around the corner from the Temple. In their High Holy Day finest, now a little worse for the wear after sitting in services for hours on end, they swung languidly on squeaky swings and inched their way down the rust encrusted slide. A fine sight they made for an hour or so, until one of the older kids declared it time was to go back.

For years, I was one of those kids. Immediately upon the conclusion of the afternoon service and before a word of Yizkor was uttered, I was ushered out of the sanctuary with a foreboding warning to not return until the appointed time, despite the fact that hordes of people, who hadn't been there all day, were entering the sanctuary at that very moment. What, I wondered, was so secretive or inappropriate that that I and my friends were exiled from the Temple at what seemed to be the most popular time? All day long we were told to sit still and be quiet, and now we were being shown out by bouncers with boutonnières.

It was sometime in high school that I dared to sit through part of a Yizkor service. Glancing surreptitiously around, I recall the woman who sat in the pew behind us. Hidden behind oversized sunglasses ala Jackie Onassis, tears streamed down her cheeks in a steady flow. And the dad of one of my best friends, always jovial and outwardly carefree either suddenly developed the flu or was emotionally distraught by the goings on.

## Yizkor – Yom Kippur 5776

Most people are familiar with the prevailing superstition: if your parents are alive, don't stay for Yizkor. Doing so will tempt the evil eye, *pu-pu-pu*. For the record, there is no requirement, according to Jewish law, that one whose parents are alive must leave the service. It's merely a custom, and fear of tempting the evil eye is a *bubbe-meise*. Regardless, I'm not in a position to decree what is the most appropriate place for the non-mourner when it comes to Yizkor. Each community and each family has its own practice. What matters is that we take the time not only on this sacred day but throughout the year – on the Jewish Festivals of Sukkot, Pesach and Shavuot and on the anniversary of our loved one's death - to remember them. We remember our own loved ones. We think of members of our community whose lives once touched ours. We memorialize those who have no one to remember them, who died *Al Kiddush HaShem*, merely because they were Jews.

Recalling the loved ones who we miss can be difficult, especially in this public setting. We come where with our own memories, with our own emotions, with our own remembrances that make us smile or cry or laugh or cringe or ---you add the words. While we mourn as individuals, there is comfort in knowing that in this setting we are not alone. We have one another for support. We have one another for comfort. We have one another with whom to share memories or with whom to sit in silent contemplation.

It was only five weeks before Rick and I got married that my mother died. She struggled heroically for eighteen months against an aggressive form of leukemia. For some of her treatments she was in a hospital in Westchester County, New York, near where Rick worked. Rick visited her a lot, encouraging her to keep up both her strength and her spirit. I was

## Yizkor – Yom Kippur 5776

especially close to my mom and it was excruciating to see her suffer so terribly. The times of hope for a full recovery were soon followed by times of despair as the cancer kept its relentless march against her, but knowing that Rick was there to keep her company, when I couldn't be, gave me comfort.

To lose a parent is a heartache that most experience according to the natural flow of time and order. To lose a parent weeks before one's wedding or other *simchah* is immeasurably painful. Life and death, pleasure and sorrow, love and loss: these all are intrinsically intertwined. Mere words cannot soften the blow. Bittersweet meditations give no solace. But the love endures, and when we honor the memory of those who have died, their love continues to inspire us, guide us, and comfort us.

I am no longer that child who was banished to the playground to avoid Yizkor. Now I am a mother of three who mourns the passing of both my parents. I am here to honor their memory, as you are here to honor the memory of your loved ones. We are here because we belong here. We have lost those who formed the core of our existence. In being here, we have found the loving support of community and tradition. We have each other. Let us go forward to honor the memory of those who have died. And let us go forward in the knowledge that we are the loving strength of those who, one day, will mourn us.

*Zikhroman livrakhah.* May the memory of those we remember always be a blessing.