

Yizkor
Yom Kippur 5776
Rabbi Robyn Fryer Bodzin

What we are doing right now is rather bizarre. At home we have calendars full of upcoming meetings, doctors appointments, after school programming, guitar lessons, winter travel and hopefully a few simchas as well. Some events we are really looking forward to and others we simply know we have to do. We have full futures to focus on and -- because we are Jews -- to worry about.

We are dressed nicely today. We are fasting. Most of us are reciting words we have been saying once a year for most of our lives, words that come from somewhere deep inside of us.

We wave at familiar faces, perhaps people we have known forever but only see on this day. Or maybe we are in this room for the very first time, and we don't know anyone, but we feel like we must be here now, if only for this half hour. It is comforting and it is right to be here.

At some point today, whether consciously or unconsciously, we will compare today to every day like today in the past.

People float in and out of the Sanctuary. Kids run in the hallways. Adults congregate in the hallways. New babies are fussed over. There are beautiful displays of friendship. We catch up, to the best of our ability without showing pictures from our phones. There are some people, even, who arrive at 8:30 and stay in the Sanctuary all day long.

There is a rhythm to what goes on in shuls on Yom Kippur. There is no guide book on how to behave, or who takes on what role, it just is.

There is a nice buzz as Jews gather together on the holiest day of the year to recite the ancient prayers in which we apologize to God for our errors and pledge to do better next year.

And for those of us who are in the Sanctuary to daven, we pray, we really say sorry. We beat our breasts and not only apologize for our own errors, but for the errors of everyone else who was not able to enter the Sanctuary with us.

And yet, at this particular moment on Yom Kippur, the moment when we remember those who have departed the world, now is when the Sanctuary is full and we all grieve together. This room is packed now, for this hour, not on Purim or Simchat Torah, the so called "fun" holidays.

Why on a day that has so much to do with life, do we set aside a time to dig into the past? Why do we contemplate the death of others today with such a public performance, and with the Torahs out? Why do we return to the Valley of the Shadow of Death now?

What is the purpose of injecting into our Yom Kippur observance a *ritual* where wounds are opened up, when we expose ourselves to a pain that has potentially subsided and when we have to confront our losses again? Why subject ourselves to the agony?

What is the purpose of all this?

Shouldn't we, instead, concentrate together on living today?

There is so little we do together as a community, or even as families, but THIS we come out in droves to do?

We don't see each other at the mall, we shop online . How many of you have shopped on Amazon this past year? Bought shoes from Zappos? Ordered photos via Shutterfly?

We don't read the same newspaper, we pick and choose what we want to read from whichever publication we choose from the Internet.

We don't eat family meals. Who sits around a kitchen table at 6 pm eating a casserole with your kids or spouse any more ? Hopefully some of us at least have Shabbat meals together.

We can't hang out at the watercooler on Fridays talking about shows like Seinfeld anymore, because we have 800 channels to choose from and we all watch our own shows.

I bet if you told a teenager about the days when the entire country tuned in to listen to the same program on the radio, they would not even understand what you are talking about.

When I was a teenager I had my own phone line at my parents home and I would talk late at night to my friends. Now kids don't even talk. They text.

When you look at a line of people waiting for the bus, they are all standing the same way, face down, one hand holding a device of sorts. Nobody is talking to each other.

I have 750 followers on Twitter, and I have no idea who most of them are.

We are just so wrapped up in our own worlds, going to doctor appointments, taking care of our children or grandchildren or parents that we all live in our own silos.

We might lead fuller lives but we are more alone than ever before.

Or are we?

One of the most meaningful tasks that I am privileged to do is stand under a chuppah with two people who are deeply in love. While the gathered guests usually see the couple as well as me behind them, my experience is completely different.

You see, I feel the presence of sibling, parents, grandparents and other family members who left this world and now occupy space in the World to Come. These same people you say Yizkor for today come down and watch as close as they can, without actually joining us here in Olam Hazei. Maybe you have felt them. Maybe you felt someone caress your cheek or touch your elbow.

These same people are there when you name your child. I know that Aaron's father was on this bima with us when we named our child after him. They cry alongside you as infant boys are brought into the covenant of the Jewish people and then as these babies go off to school for the first time.

These same people peer in from the border of the World to Come and our World, as your child or grandchild recites the words of the Aliyah at his or her bar or bat mitzvah. There is someone holding on to their hand as they hold on to the Torah.

Your loved ones accompany you on the first day of a new job. Your loved ones are with you during chemo, your child's graduation and at your retirement party. Our loved ones that have gone before us are nearby at all of life's liminal and profound moments.

And they are nearby today.

There are thousands of souls floating around this room and smiling down on us. .

They are here today because today is one of those liminal moments.

"B'rosh hashanah yikatevun, uv yom tzom kippur yechatemun — On Rosh HaShanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed." Our fate is decided TODAY.

Our loved ones are doing their part to ensure we stay here in THIS WORLD and we make it through the gates at Neilah. They are not ready for us to join them yet. They want to keep watching over us for a while longer. They enjoy it. They get a lot of naches out of us.

On a day when we acknowledge the enormity of God, we are also remembering how small we are and broken we are, and our imperfections are brought up to the surface. Our loved ones are nearby ensuring we make it through this Yom Kippur marathon.

And so perhaps Yizkor is placed now on Yom Kippur, this Shabbat Shabbaton, so we can collectively say thank you to the people who are watching over us and ensuring we make it through the gates tonight.

Since our loved ones are so close by today, they can hear our prayers and our cries.

They appreciate the candles that were lit in their memory. They appreciate when we take the time to look at their photographs in our very busy lives. And they appreciate that we associate them with the holiest day of the year.

More than that, they appreciate that we see remembering them as important.

Yes it is somewhat painful for us to take the bandaids off during Yizkor and reopen the wounds, but we need to remember our loved ones are working overtime on our behalf today.

Maybe the Sanctuary is full now because somehow we all know that our loved ones are nearby when we need them. Maybe we felt their presence at that doctor's appointment. Maybe it was the wind we felt when we revisited our childhood vacation spot.

We come to Yizkor carrying our memories of the people who we loved, who influenced us, who we argued with, who we hugged, who we found fascinating, who we found frustrating, who made us who we are.

Through Yizkor, we take them out of our past, bring them back into our presence and **thank them** for watching over us.

At the rising of the 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 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

as we remember them.

When we are weary and in need of strength

We remember them.

When we are lost and sick at heart

We remember them.

When we have joy we crave to share

We remember them.

When we have decisions that are difficult to make

We remember them.

When we have achievements that are based on theirs

We remember them.

As long as we live, they too will live;

for they are now a part of us

as we remember them

now at Yizkor.

(poem at end by Rabbi Jack Riemer and Sylvan Kamens) .