

Yom Kippur Dvar 5767 Kol Sasson

I want to begin by thanking everyone in Kol Sasson for their tremendous efforts. These efforts fall into two categories: avodah, the administrative tasks and physical toil of shlepping that have made all of this, but also for your **AVODAH SHEBALEV** the toiling of your hearts which has poured out in prayer and singing. Your willingness to bring **out** what is usually **internal** has made this a powerful davening experience for myself and my family. This is not easy to accomplish and I know is that it feels like it is working . So far, these yamim noraim have been wonderful .

In thinking about the major themes of this holiest of days, and the timing of this Dvar Torah, I wanted to focus on the concept of remembrance.

This word, appears in many Hebrew forms all over the davening: Yizkor, Zachor, Zichronot, Zocher ha Brit and on this day we sing over and over “Zochreynu lechayim” , remember us, God, for life. The concept of memory is such an interesting one: sometimes it is something passive that just lives within us and at other times we can activate it in others. It can be evoked by all the senses. And sometimes we possess collective memories of events that we have not actually experienced but which form an important part of our collective unconsciousness.

Jewish liturgy as a genre of Jewish texts helps embed these memories within us.

Because the prayers function as poems, with layers upon layers of language and images forming points and counterpoints against each other, we can re-live experiences from multiple perspectives and set off powerful emotional reactions that can add to our kavannah. Because our tefilot contain so many quotations from the Tanach and are punctuated by the reading of the Torah and Haftarah, the poetry of the prayers are even further embellished by the story cycles that we encounter as we pray.

There are several sacred narratives which inform davening on both RH and YK: One is the story of Abraham, the miraculous birth of Yitzhak and the Akeidah.

Another is the elaborate routine of the Kohen Gadol on YK which we have just completed reading in Aharei Mot and will revisit during Musaf when we actually re-enact the drama of the Bet Mikdash, sprinkling the blood, “ahat be ahat” and prostrating ourselves in a manner that is so ancient and powerful that it always reminds me of the moment when my husband elevates the shmurah matza on Pesah and recites “THIS (HALACHMA) IS the bread of affliction.... and I always burst into tears. These are moments of true drama when the words and the choreography and the setting permit theatrical poignance and release.

The third narrative is much more subtle because we do not read the actual stories from the Torah. If you do not know these references they might pass you by and the structure

of some of the most important parts of the YK davening, especially the Slichot, will pass you by, so I thought I would share them with you. We don't read these stories, probably because they are embarrassing family stories and well...why REMIND God.

Essentially, the reason, perhaps, that we pray communally for all of our sins on YK is not to remind us that we are joined as one, but more likely because we are playing the roles of the original generation of Israelite sinners, when they do their two great communal sins: the Egel haZahav in Ki Tissa and the sin of the Spies found in Parshat Shlach Lcha/. Both of these events are the templates for communal sin, when as a collective the people lose their faith in God, their trust in the covenant and begin to long for easier, simpler solutions to the complex life that is being literally "mapped out" for them: obey these laws and you will receive the land flowing with milk and honey. In both cases, God wants to obliterate the people completely, many people do die. One of the reasons that we fast is a form of reenactment where we become the Israelites who recognize that the consequence of their sins is death, and to show this to God, they mourn for themselves.

Here is where the liturgy becomes brilliant poetry. At the end of the Egel incident, Moshe seeks another form of contact with God, independent of the revelation of the Law. It is a blend of rapprochement, reconciliation and intimacy all in one. SHMOT 33:1-17-18 . This is the moment when the 13 midot, God's attributes of mercy and forgiveness are expressed to Moshe as something essential about God, that we quote back and rely upon during our recitation of the Selichot. If you look at the prayer which introduces our

recitation of the 13 midot, “Eyl Melech Yoshev al Kisei” which we do over and over and over again it is full of the same vocabulary that appear in the midot. And then the drama is as if each and every one of us becomes like Moshe, up on the mountain, “vikra bshem adonai” calling God’s name not in atonement for sin any longer, but in total intimacy and transcendence. AT-ONE-MENT . As Judy Teibloom taught me, “On Tisha B’av we fast because, how **could** we eat...but on YK, we fast because we have no **need** for food.” Our fasting here makes us, again, like Moshe, up on the mountain, away from the entrapments of our physical selves. At another level, Moshe is the foil for Abraham whose deep connection with God is lived out in within the context of his fleshiness and his family, pushing him to an almost unnatural domain.

Moshe leaves his physical self behind to go up the mountain and have this experience. On the twin days of Rosh haShanah and Yom Kippur we get to remember and live out both of these experiences. It is the layering of these images and memories and the swiftness with which they run through the mahzor that generates a dynamic experience for us when we are paying attention.

I hope a reminder of these stories adds a dimension of history and meaning to the recitation of the selichot and prayers for all of you on this day. If these days succeed, we have an opportunity to feel fear, trembling, awe, shame and the opposing sensation of protection and closeness within a community of people sharing the moment with us.

Gemar Hatima Tovah

As we enter yizkor, there are only a few words to share. Now we use our lips to stimulate personal memories by saying the names of the loved ones we so wish were physically in our presence today.

Memory is God-like because it transcends time

Memory is Godlike because it transcends death

Like David Silverman I am a great lover of Hebrew poetry and had already thought to share this poem with you in preparation for Yizkor. It was written by Zelda Mishkovsky who lived from 1914-1984 and is so famous in Israel that she is known only by her first name- Zelda. A collection of her work has just appeared in translation. For those of you reciting yizkor I have no pithy words of wisdom other than to say that you are not alone and hope that this poem is meaningful for you.

Lchol Ish yesh Shem

Each of us has a name

Given us by God

And given by our parents

Each of us has a name

Given by our stature and our smile

And given by what we wear

Each of us has a name

Given by the mountains
And given by our walls
Each of us has a name
Given by the stars
And given by our neighbors
Each of us has a name
Given by our sins
And given by our longing
Each of us has a name
Given by our enemies
And given by our love
Each of us has a name
Given by our celebrations
And given by our work
Each of us has a name
Given by the seasons
And given by our blindness
Each of us has a name
Given by the sea
And given by
Our death.

