**Call My Name, Seek My Face**

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**Yom Kippur - Yizkor**

I received a pre Yom Kippur request from someone in our community: I won’t be able to be in shul for Yizkor. Would you please remember the names of my loved ones during the time of memory.

We want to recall the names of those we love. Names impart identity and meaning to our lives.

According to recent research, using or hearing your own name is considered comparable to recognising your own image in a mirror. Think of how children delight in hearing their name. Hearing your name causes your brain to respond as if you are engaging your core identity and personality markers.

Part of what is so painful about the Shoah is that there are no cemeteries, no headstones to mark the loss of the six million. So we do what we can to remember. Families place the names of murdered relatives on the back of tombstones in Canada. Some place stumblestones — *stolpersteine* — into the pavement of German cities. Others reclaim and restore European cemeteries. Others participate in the March of the Living or similar pilgrimages to Eastern Europe.

Yad Vashem houses three million Pages of Testimony, information submitted about the people who were killed. The Central Database of Shoah Victims has recovered names and life stories of almost  four million eight hundred thousand Jews murdered by the Nazis and their accomplices

We do not want our dead to remain anonymous, faceless, unknown. That is why it is necessary for families to maintain a comprehensive list of their deceased relatives. Take time over the next weeks to list as many relatives as possible from previous generations. It is so important to also tell stories about the people for whom we are named. Try to find individuals to identify the people in your old photos and write the names on the back. A few years ago, I asked a cousin if she recognised someone in a photo I had found. She said, “I certainly do. They are my parents.”

God’s name also occupies an important place in the prayers of Yom Kippur. We don’t pronounce the 4 letter sacred name comprised of Y-H-V-H. We simply say Hashem, the Name. In the Musaf Avodah service, we reenact the confession ritual of the High Priest, the Kohen Gadol and invoke God’s Name:

…וכך היה אומר: אנא השם, חטאתי עויתי, פשעתי לפניך

Please Hashem, I have sinned inadvertently, committed conscious iniquities, and transgressed with intent. In accordance with your holy Name, please forgive and pardon my sins, iniquities and transgressions.

Before reciting the detailed *vidui*, confession, we call upon God by name.  And we identify the divine *middot*, qualities of love and compassion, that we sing:  *Hashem, Hashem, El Rahum v’Hanun….*

Although the Torah clearly states that we can’t see God (Ex 33.20), we yearn for the Presence of the Holy One. In the seasonal Psalm, we imagine God saying, My heart says, seek my face.

We assent:  I shall seek Your face. אֶת־פָּנֶ֖יךָ ה’ אֲבַקֵּֽשׁ׃  (Ps. 27.8)

A few years ago, a friend took me to the National Military Cemetery at Mt. Herzl. I’ve always been moved by the simple memorial markers there.  Name, parents, birth location, dates of birth, aliyah and death, and the military operation when the death occurred.

Each one of the fallen also has a name inscribed on a brick in the Memorial Hall, as well as a retrievable electronic record. Every day at 11am, those who died on that day are memorialised in this architectural gem of a building. When I visited, I was privileged to participate in this modest and moving ceremony.

It is clear from the gravestones, that some who died were young Shoah survivors who.  Hastily recruited and trained, they died fighting for the fledgling state. Sadly, there is very little personal or family information for over 800 individuals who died in the War of Independence. Just a name and a date. They have been swallowed up in anonymity.

A project called Giving a Face to the Fallen — לתת פנים לנופלים seeks to identify personal information and family members of the deceased. It requires genealogical sleuthing to gather information and establish these personal contacts.

On Yom Hazikaron of 2014, my friend Steve left a note on the memorial for Tuvia Mermelstein. Only his name and date of death of were known.  Steve hoped that someone who might visit on Yom Hazikaron or another day might contact him. A call came.

From a nephew, the team learned the names of Tuvia's parents and birth city, Bychkov, Czechoslovakia. The nephew knew only that his uncle had survived the Shoah, came to Israel as a refugee and fell in battle. Steve discovered that Tuvia’s boat had arrived on Shabbat morning, May 15, the day after the proclamation of the State of Israel. Tuvia died ten days later at Latrun. When Tuvia’s siblings and family came on aliyah after 1974, they had a photo of him.

The following year, a tour guide who passed Tuvia's gravesite met Yitzhak Sherman standing by the grave. Yitzhak had befriended Tuvia on the journey to Israel. He remembered that Tuvia taught a group of young people on the boat to sing Hatikvah. They had shared a shaving kit and were sent to Latrun to prepare for battle. Unwell, Yitzhak couldn’t go with his group. He survived. Tuvia was killed. “I come each year to remember him” ~~ “הוא חשב על החיים, על הניצחון, על המולדת ועל חיים שקטים”

A news article led to others who had been on the boat or connected to the Latrun battles. For the memorial service on Yom Hazikaron 2018, thirty-five people, including three generations of Tuvia Mermelstein’s family, gathered to unveil a new gravestone. Tuvia had a face and a family to remember him.

My friend, Yossi Klein Halevi, wrote *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbour*  trying to expose the face of Israel to its neighbours. He wants Jews and Palestinians to learn what the other is giving up in any settlement.  As he says, we need Palestinians to understand that relinquishing areas of Yehuda and Shomron would be a deep loss, just as Yaffo and Haifa were losses for them.

His interfaith experiences led him to realize that Palestinians did not really understand why the State of Israel was spiritually important to Jews. 30 years ago, Oslo brought together two national groups, but didn’t take religion seriously. In these letters, Yossi explains that he left America and moved to Israel to participate in the drama of the renewal of a Jewish homeland, which he is committed to see succeed as a morally responsible, democratic state in the Middle East. He wants the Palestinians to speak his name and see his face.

One of the main obstacles to peace is an inability to hear the other side’s story, For peace to succeed in the Middle East, it must speak in some way to our hearts. Not the language of politics, but the language of the spirit.

Yossi believes this language is shared by Muslims and Jews, who have co-habited and loved this small slice of the world for centuries. The key is to develop a “discourse of spiritual dignity.”

He notes a concern that I have also expressed:

…How do you go on that journey of curiosity and take that step toward empathy without losing the core of your own being, your own specific loyalties?

I have led 5 multi-faith study missions to Israel and Palestine. A Holocaust-centred Israeli narrative leaves Israel vulnerable to accusations that the Palestinians have paid for what European anti-semitism and Nazi genocide did to the Jews. It also ignores the centrality of the land of Israel to Judaism and the Jewish people.

Yossi notes:

…We have told the story of Zionism of need, but not of the Zionism of longing. We’ve forgotten how to tell that story, even to ourselves – an unbelievable story of how Jews maintained a kind of vicarious indigenousness with the homeland we lost but never ceded. And that’s a story that we need to start telling again –- to the Arab world, and also to ourselves.

His *Letters*, posted on-line in Arabic, are an exercise in empathy and engagement, the key pillars of our High Holy Day Reader.

I have found that interfaith activity can yield benefits. Some of them are insights into our own faith tradition. Imam Abdullah Antepli, who co-leads with Yossi the Muslim-Jewish encounter at the Hartman Institute, commented that he loves Yom Kippur — for two reasons.

•  Jews beat their fists on their chests, rather than toward others. AND

•  Jews fast for one day, not one month.

The Sharing Perspectives/ Path of Abraham study mission, in which I participate, will take place again in February. We bring British and Canadian Christians, Muslims and Jews to learn about three faiths, two people and one land. If you are interested, please speak with me or go on line to St George’s College Jerusalem, which will be hosting this extraordinary opportunity

It is uncomfortable and disturbing to listen to Palestinians tell their stories. Even when I want to jump in and say, “No, It’s not like that!”, I have learned to listen deeply. Last year, with Project Rozana, an initiative to build Palestinian-Israeli cooperation for medical care, I came to understand how challenging it is to navigate the health care system from the Israeli Administered Territories. But I also met medical practitioners - Israeli and Palestinians - who are committed to improving health care.

I have sat with Israelis whose children were killed in terrorist bombings and Palestinians who have had siblings killed by security forces. Although I believe in the justice of Zionism and of the Jewish right to the our historic homeland, I choose to make myself vulnerable to hear the pain of others. As Brené Brown notes: “Vulnerability is not knowing victory or defeat, it’s understanding the necessity of both; it’s engaging. It’s being all in.”

As when you visit a shivah where you fear that you will meet someone with whom you have had a difficult relationship,“Sometimes the bravest and most important thing you can do is just show up.” (Brené Brown).

Today, as you think of each person that you remember, call up his or her image in your mind. Try to remember how she spoke, how he smiled, the texture of her skin, the bristle of his face, Her scent , his fresh smell when dressed for a special occasion. Think of a moment that was important to each of you.

The Israeli poet Zelda was recognised for her spiritual writing. One of her poems reflects the rabbinic teaching that we each have three names: what our parents named us, what our friends call us and one that we acquire through our actions. טוֹב מִכֻּלָּן מַה שֶּׁקּוֹנֶה הוּא לְעַצְמוֹ. The most meaningful is what we acquire ourselves. (*Midrash Tanhuma, Va’Yaq’hel 1*).

לְכָל אִישׁ יֵשׁ שֵׁם שֶׁנָּתַן לוֹ אֱלֹהִים וְנָתְנוּ לוֹ אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ

לְכָל אִישׁ יֵשׁ שֵׁם שֶׁנָּתְנוּ לוֹ קוֹמָתוֹ וְאֹפֶן חִיּוּכוֹ

Each of us has a name
given 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 neighbours

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.  (translated by Marcia Falk)

As you go on your journeys through life, hold onto the names and faces of those you love and remember. They anchor us and give us direction.
Write their names. Identify their faces. Tell their stories.
Don’t let them be anonymous.

May those names and faces bring you blessing.

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