

YOM KIPPUR  
5774

There was no sukai. Sukai is a Zen concept. There is no sukai when everything comes together in the present moment. The samurai, the sword, the gnat and the motion are all one. Like when a searing line drive is hit to the shortstop and without any gaps in time the bat, the ball, the glove and the shortstop all come together when he dives and catches it. If he stopped to think about it for a split second, it would not happen.

Most of us are either remembering the past or thinking about the future; whether we are thinking about what happened at work yesterday or about Break-fast tonight. There is a gap between us and the present moment. Remembering can only be done in the present moment which is why when we remember it makes someone or something come alive. Remembering , we will remember, is an active process, it is something we must willfully do. We cannot remember in the past or in the future; we can only remember now.

Ludwig Wittenstein, a Jewish Austrian philosopher, reminds us that eternal life belongs only to those who live in the present; the present moment is the only moment in which we live. Rabbi Heschel teaches that it is absurd to worry about what happens to us after we die if we are not totally concerned with how we live our lives everyday in the present. Understandably, we think a lot about death and dying. A friend's mother observed how everyone wants to go to heaven but no one wants to die. She asked: "How else can you get there?" Worrying about dying is to some degree unavoidable but it compromises our living in the present and having faith in the future.

What have we learned from our deceased parents and others? What is part of us today that we received from them? How are they with us now? What have our children received from their grandparents and great grandparents through us and is a part of them even though they may never have known their grandparents or great grandparents in real time? What do we cherish that they gave to us? Is there anything we would like to give back?

For all of us blessed with having our ageing loved ones with us today, are we investing time and effort in sitting with them, interviewing them, getting recipes from them, encouraging them to share their joys and also their sadness and regrets, asking them what mistakes they made and what truths they learned? When possible we should take tours with them of where they grew up and lived and for those who came from Europe and elsewhere, if at all possible go back with them. We cannot afford to put any of this off. Committing to do this has to take place in the present moment and doing it in what will be a present moment in the future.

Our “Shema Koleinu” prayer, “Hear our voice and do not forget us when we are old and when our strength has waned” is more challenging for us than it was for our ancestors because of how much longer people live. Our rabbis tell us that how we treat our ageing and elderly defines who we are as a society, as families and as individuals. Dementia and Alzheimer challenges us to not forget those who forget; to remember those who cannot remember and to remember they need our visits, company, conversation and they need the touch of our hand. There are many ageing residents in their own homes and in hundreds of facilities in this country who do remember but are not visited or visited as often as they should be. Think of all the stories, life lessons and memories they could share that we could enjoy, learn from and pass down.

Many Holocaust survivors are facing afflictions of poverty and loneliness here and in Israel. Some worry about who will remember them. Not surprisingly, many have no children or other family. How sad is it to have survived the Holocaust only to die lonely and in poverty? What can we do as the American Jewish community for these survivors? What can Israel do? What more can we do here in Cincinnati?

Who among us can remind us more of this mitzvah than our own survivors who are ageing—until 120 for all of you! And what about those of the Great Generation who also are ageing—unto 120! In many ways you are role models. We have great respect and regard for you, what you experienced and did, how you gave birth to future generations and how you teach us to appreciate life and never give up hope. Never should we be tested like you were; may your example give us strength and guide us as to what we need to be doing with our lives and what we need not to be wasting time on.

Just as we need to talk to our ageing family members and friends, those who are ageing need to help make this happen. We need to remember to share what we have learned, pass down traditions, stories and family history before we die. There may be times when we have to assert ourselves and say to someone, a family member, a friend or another, “you have to sit down and listen, I have important things to share that you need to hear and that I want you to pass down.” Then, those of us who need to listen need to sit down and really listen. The empty chair left behind at the Shabbat or seder table and the empty seat in the synagogue are filled when we in present time remember what we heard and learned from the one who sat there. How well we do this will determine what level of continuity there is and will be from generation to generation, *mi dor l’dor*.

The poet Nicholas Gordon writes: “Pretend there were no memories, each generation on its own, so would miracles and crimes alike be lost to their own times. Crazy witnesses would on their knees haunt desperately our doors of stone.” When we do not remember those who came before us, when we do not value their memories, we do not value their lives. When we do not remember in the present everything of the past disappears. What can be more frightening to one who is alive than to think that when I die I will be forgotten? Why do so many young people not understand this and think that when they are old it will be different for them?

As far as remembering, do we remember that immortality is found not in how long we live but in how we live and what we do with our lives? This is determined as Viktor Frankl, a survivor and a philosopher, maintains by how well we accept that human life cannot be complete without suffering and death. Do we wish it was different? Certainly! But it is not.

How many of us spend too much of our time running from this reality, denying it and living indulgent lives desperately trying to defeat it? This reality does not preclude there being joy and enjoyment in life. To live as if we can escape the reality of death, an imperfect world, a world filled with natural disasters and human caused suffering is not a responsible way to live. We need a sobering acceptance of reality and at the same time an affirmation of life in its fullest. We need to have a mature and sophisticated understanding of the challenges of life and at the same time a thankful acknowledgment of all the blessings and

goodness of life. The Talmud tells us that when we die and go to heaven we will be held accountable for all the prohibited pleasures we enjoyed in this world but we also will be held accountable for all the permitted pleasures we denied ourselves.

To acknowledge that our world is unredeemed and broken is the first part of becoming partners with G-d in improving and fixing our world for future generations. It is not just about us, it is about our remembering there were those before us and there will be those after us. What does that do, for example, for our temporal considerations as to what it would cost to protect our environment for future generations? How, from a Jewish point of view, does this and other issues and concerns have anything to do with politics or money when they have everything to do with mitzvot? How?

Last Rosh HaShanah I shared how our daily minyan was struggling. In recent years we have been communicating this regularly with our congregation and asking for help. I need to share with you on this Yom Kippur that our daily minyan is threatened. In the non-Orthodox world daily minyanim are disappearing. Why? Because fewer of us are saying Kaddish, fewer of us are observing yartzheit and fewer of us are coming to minyan to assure that there is a minyan for those who need to say kaddish. I have seen a dramatic change in the observance of these mitzvot in my twenty plus years here at Adath Israel. Our minyan will not be able to sustain itself if this trend does not turn around. I hope and pray that this does not happen. We all need to know and accept—especially on Yom Kippur—that we create our own realities. Let us also remember in the spirit of Yizkor that there is no replacement for coming to minyan for Kaddish and yartzheit with children and grandchildren to honor and remember our loved ones.

Our minyan will not be here if we do not return to observing these time honored mitzvot. We do not want someone observing yartzheit or having just lost a parent to come here for minyan some evening and the building will be dark and locked up. I would say G-d forbid that it should ever happen at Adath Israel but, G-d really has absolutely nothing to do with it, it is entirely up to us. So please, let us all quietly, earnestly and significantly make a commitment to our daily minyan right now

in this present moment of Yom Kippur. Think of this: if we come to one minyan a week we are helping our daily minyan 52 times a year; twice a week, 104 times a year.

Without memories there is no history and without history there is no future. If the present moment is disconnected from the past, there is no future. Just as we cannot live in the past or the future there is no meaningful and real moment of our lives void of the past and detached from the future. When we understand and value this, we are more likely to appreciate that which has been given to us, what we have to take care of and what we have to pass down. We will appreciate how what we do in the here and now has consequences down the road. If everyone before speaking or acting could see what the results of our words and actions would be—later today, tomorrow, a year from now or ten years from now—how would this influence us? If people of great power and great wealth would think this way, how different would our world be?

In Judaism, as Amos Oz points out, there is more concern with holy time than holy places. What are we doing with our time remembering there is only the present moment? Given how much discretionary time we have—even for those of us still working full time to say nothing of those retired or semi-retired—are we living time or killing time? What we do with our time contributes significantly to how in the end our lives will be described; what we do with our time defines significantly who we are. If an accurate log was kept about what we did with our time, what would it record?

A young congregant shared at her grandmother's funeral that when visiting her grandmother right before she died, her grandmother told her that she was not afraid. Her grandmother then went on and said: "And when your time comes, you also will not be afraid." I sense that this grandmother is always with this granddaughter and chances are good that she, the granddaughter, will be with her grandchildren when their time comes.

Marney Winston-Macavley, a Canadian Jew, tells how he was holding his father's hand right before his dad died. "His father said to him to please remember this touch." Marney then goes on to say: "I always will, I always do, every moment and he is always with me."

### **A Psalm of Life**

Tell me not in mournful numbers  
Life is but an empty dream  
For the soul is dead that slumbers  
And things are not what they seem.  
Life is real, life is earnest  
And the grave is not its goal.  
Dust thou art to dust returnest  
Was not spoken of the soul.  
Lives of great ones all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime  
And departing leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time.

Our future is connected to our present and our present flows forth from our past and this is what eternal life is about. There is no sukai; there is no separation. Let us accept and embrace our Jewish faith that we live forever through memory knowing full well that this is only possible if those of us who are presently alive actually remember. This is why our remembering in the present moment is so important, this is why our remembering keeps us alive, keeps our loved ones alive and this is why our remembering is so holy. Let us never forget this.

YIZKOR