

Yizkor Message 5769

- Marvin Goldman

I can never tell anyone how to feel or respond to the Yizkor service. Even the translated words "Memorial Services", do not invoke nor describe the deep emotional response I have during the time I spend preparing and reciting the Yizkor.

For me this is an awesome moment wherein I become a bridge that spans the past and future of Judaism. In preparation for the service, I reflect not only on my personal past, but also the history and future of our people.

On one side, I stand with our forefathers encamped at Mount Sinai and at the same moment I ride on the railroad tracks to the concentration camps. My past is intertwined with great moments of joy and tragedy.

I do not stand alone. With me are my parents and my loved ones and their countless families, the totality of the Jewish past. The 'mispacha' has gathered. I feel sadness. I want to touch and kiss each one, telling them how much I miss them. However, I know there will be no physical response. Yet, I have an overwhelming sense of calm. There are so many questions I want to ask. As if they are aware of my trepidation, each responds with a smile; one that conveys a message that with them, all is well.

I then turn to the other side of the bridge. I only see a fog. I cannot make out anything. It is all a blur. On one hand, I am afraid. I do not see a road to follow. I do not know which direction to set forth upon. Yet I know that I must continue my journey. Eventually the sun will shine and the haze will evaporate.

Suddenly I hear the voices of my past. They tell me not to be afraid. They remind me, they too stood in my predicament. They calmly say: "Remember what we taught you, be a mensch, and care for your families, your communities, and your traditions."

It is then I realize I do not face the future alone. As it states in the Yizkor, "Their souls are bound up in the land of the living". I face the trepidations of the future holding on to the hands and teachings of the past.

I raise a family with love and care because I had parents as role models. I stress learning every day of my life because I had teachers as role models. I know my responsibilities as a member of a community because others by their example have shaped my life.

Now I can begin to approach the Yizkor, as a bridge from the past to the future.

Suddenly, a strange phrase leaps out of the prayer book: "I pledge tzedaka (charity)." What is it doing in this prayer? How does it affect the moment of Yizkor?

I then realize, it is not enough to understand the how, and the method - the bridge from the past

to the future. As in any belief, a physical response is required. It is at that moment of direction, I first repond with an act of faith.

At that moment , I vow to be a better father, husband, Rabbi, and mensch in life. At the same time, as a member of a faith community, I must vow the perpetuation of the source of all our values, the Torah, as continued in the sanctuaries of the past. I refer to the synagogues and its places of learning.

Bettering myself as a person is done by changing my ways. This message is the essence of Yom Kippur.

However, assuring the bridging of Judaism, our past to the future requires the giving of money. This is not an affirmation of the self, it is a commitment, a demonstration of my belief in the continuation of Judaism. If at this moment I cannot make a charitable donation, I am testifying there is no Jewish future.

At this time of the year, there are some who believe that the Synagogue is a place where they only ask for money. Not so! The synagogue asks you to be a partner in the continuation of Judaism. This requires a commitment every day of the year. One is not a mensch on only certain days of the year.

As demonstrated, the first response is not limited to the Synagogue, while the second evolves only around the institution.

The Synagogue needs your financial support. Remember the closing of a Synagogue does not diminish Judaism. It is only a sad commentary of the nature of a community.

As I commented at the outset of this note " I can never tell anyone how to feel or respond to the Yizkor service".

As mine, your response will be a deep personal one. For me, it is a voyage in Jewish history, past, present and future. It concludes with a monetary act of faith. All I ask is to consider my journey.