

## Yom Kippur Yizkor - 2014

Hazzan Dulkan Sings L'dor Vador

Such a beautiful melody and such powerful words – *l'dor vador naggid godlekha*,  
From one generation to another we will declare Your greatness, and forever sanctify You with words of holiness.

L'dor VaDor – It is a well-known prayer we recite three times every day during the Amidah – It is an expression that we hear often.

What does it mean to us today – looking back and looking ahead?

What does it mean to pass on values, and lessons and stories from one generation to the next?

What does it mean to have memories of the past – what does it mean to create memories for the future?

Some call it Jewish continuity – some call it L'Dor VaDor

I want us to consider what L'Dor VaDor mean to us today as we gather on this most sacred day to prepare for Yizkor.

This summer, Sara and I went to South Dakota – it was a special trip for me. In honor of my significant birthday, Sara took me to a place I always wanted to go – Mt. Rushmore – it was amazing. I will tell you more about Mt. Rushmore at another time, but for now I want to tell you about the place we went the day after Mt. Rushmore that upset me – the Crazy Horse Memorial. It was not so much about the monument to this great leader of the Native American people but it was the museum that is at Crazy Horse – a museum of the history of the Native American people – a way to remember the good times and the challenges, to help future generations remember.

With all due respect to Native American history that was displayed in that museum, I did not like my experience there because I was overwhelmed by a personal thought that day. What does it mean for a people to be remembered in a museum? What would it mean if the Jewish people were only remembered in a museum? What can we do to guarantee that our people live on so that we are not remembered only in a museum? L'dor VaDor – by passing on our Jewish values and commitments to the Jewish people, our stories and our lessons, we help guarantee our future and by remembering the past, honoring those who came before us, we help transmit Judaism from generation to generation.

The early Rabbis were brilliant in creating rituals to make this happen. The traditions around the end of life, the rituals of funeral and shiva, of being with others to say kaddish, to observe the anniversary of the death known as Yahrzeit and to gather on each major holiday to say Yizkor, when we honor our loved ones, when we recall the memories and the stories and the lessons, and when we share them with our children and grandchildren – these are critical rituals that allow us to mourn and allow us to honor those who were so much a part of our lives.

Memory is perhaps the most important Jewish value – we remember the Holocaust; we remember the Exodus from Egypt and we remember the Creation of the world every time we recite Kiddush on Shabbat. We have specific days dedicated to memory – Yom HaZikaron – The day we remember those who gave their lives in defense of the State of Israel, Yom HaShoah when we remember the six million Jews who were murdered by the Nazis. We have Yizkor, the personal prayers we recite at the end of our holiday seasons, to recall those who gave us life, who were by our side for so many important events, our parents, siblings and life partners and for some even our children who left this world long before we expected.

Yizkor provides an opportunity to think about Jewish continuity – to think about L'Dor VaDor, in a unique manner – that is why we are here – by remembering our loved ones we are continuing their traditions. We see Jewish continuity in so many of our life cycle events.

We see it at a Bris or Baby Naming – when the grand-parents kvell – knowing the child is often named for their parent in a way to keep their memory alive and pass it on into the future. We see it at a wedding when God willing, many generations are able to stand together to celebrate. Here at the synagogue we see it almost weekly when we celebrate a Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

This year, the Bat Mitzvah ritual has been on my mind because of my daughter's recent Bat Mitzvah. Until I was the father of a thirteen year old, I did not appreciate the timing of this coming of age ceremony. I did

not realize how important it was for Jewish continuity until I stood here as a father, with my parents, knowing that my daughter was named for her great grand-mother. It all came together.

As I reflect back on Dena's Bat Mitzvah, there were many moments that were special and for me emotional. But the one moment during the service when I felt the most pride is when Dena led the congregation in the opening of the Musaf Amidah, specifically the end of the Kedusha when she sang L'Dor VaDor.

It was a moment I will never forget – the next generation leading the congregation – my daughter accepting her responsibilities as a Jewish adult and using her talent and interest and with help from the Hazzan, her voice to lead the congregation in prayer – specifically that prayer – L'Dor VaDor.

I find it so empowering when our B'nai Mitzvah students sing L'Dor VaDor – representing their acceptance of the responsibilities of the adult generation. I am struck by the emotion of the moment when the 13-year olds reads Torah in the presence of their parents and grandparents and when the parents present the Tallit and symbolically transfer responsibility onto their child.

For this ceremony to be at the age of 13 is just right; these young people are on the brink of becoming adults. As my Rabbi, Rabbi Yakov Hilsenrath, of blessed memory taught me, they are entering erev adulthood – the time when they get ready for really being an adult.

Thirteen years is a significant moment in the life of a teenager and this year 13 years is significant for our country and our community. Usually Bar or Bat Mitzvah is a happy celebration. This year it is the 13<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup> – a day we all remember, a day that changed the lives of everyone in this country, especially families of those who lost loved ones.

One of the most powerful memories I have from those days was the picture on the cover of Time magazine one year later of the women who gave birth to babies who were born after their fathers died on September 11<sup>th</sup> including families from this community. Those babies are now 13 and many of them are celebrating their Bar and Bat Mitzvah this year. I am sure they are thinking about their father who is not with them and I am sure they wish there was some way they could still communicate with him and tell him all that has happened since that horrible day 13 years ago.

I read a book this summer that honors the victims of September 11<sup>th</sup>. It is called Legacy Letters – a collection of letters written on the tenth anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup>, by family members of those who perished. These family members wrote letters to their loved ones who died that day, to tell them what has happened since, to tell them that they remember them and to share many personal thoughts. Among the letters was one from a member of our local community, a young girl who was born just days after her father passed away. She wrote to her father who she never met, telling him how much she misses him every day of her life.

Others wrote other personal messages and I want to share a few with you today.

Written by Claire Dean to her father Billy Dean

Dear Daddy,

You died on 9/11. I wasn't born yet so I never met you, but I know some things about you. You were funny and smart. You were athletic and a good cook. You loved to travel to different places and be upstate at your family's summerhouse. It is hard not having a dad. I see everyone walking around and having fun with their dads. But Mom is always there for me and she is great and I know that you are with me in everything that I do. Every year we have a party to remember you. It's called "Billy Dean Day." My whole family misses you, but we know you are watching over us. Sometimes I see you in my dreams as a beautiful angel watching over me and my family because you love us and always will love us.

Love, Claire

From Bernadette Lynch Rafferty the sister of Mike Francis Lynch

Dear Mike,

You died in the line of duty, rescuing civilians trapped in an elevator at the World Trade Center. It was the second tower hit by a plane and the first to go down. . . A woman came to the firehouse and spoke on how the Ladder 4 firefighters rescued her after she had fallen into the elevator shaft. The Ladder 4 firefighters pulled her to safety with a human chain. She lived and they placed her in an ambulance. Then the building collapsed. You are a true hero along with the fifteen firefighters from your house who perished.

Mike, I guess you know that our sister Maureen died ten months after you. After 9/11 and Maureen's death, it was very difficult for our family, but people helped us by just listening and being there for us. . . The human spirit has strength and there is no other alternative but to go on. We miss you every time we look at your boys, Jack and Michael. They are beautiful and great basketball players. Denise is still healing and so are we. . . Your spirit is alive because of our love for you and your love for us. I'll be with you in the future.

All my love, Bernadette

And last from Melissa Schulman to Mark Schulman

Dear Daddy,

I can't believe it's been ten years since 9/11. Sometimes I feel like you're just going to walk through the front door and share some hilarious work stories over dinner, or I'll find you sitting on your couch screaming at the Giants on television. When I think about the last ten years . . . what sticks out in my mind are the moments when "your girls" have missed you most acutely. All the graduations, Jamie's Bat Mitzvah, every Passover when we get to the "Let Us Eat!" part of the Seder, because no one can say it the way you used to. When Grandpa Ira died and I knew you would have been the perfect person to truly describe him. Seeing my friends dance with their fathers at their weddings. I know you already know this but Mom, Jamie and I think of you every single day. You have impacted our lives so profoundly that we could never forget you. Time has helped heal our hearts some but it will never diminish how much we love you and how thankful we are to have had the time we did together. Thank you for teaching me to live life to the fullest, to always have sense of humor about life and to pull down your pants and slide on the ice. If I had not been your daughter, I never would have become the person I am today.

Missing you now and forever,

Melissa

I share these letters with today not because we need to remember September 11<sup>th</sup> now more than any other time. I share them to highlight the power of memory – to illustrate that with a good memory, we can keep our loved ones with us and they can remain important parts of our lives. I share this concept of legacy letters to help us connect to Yizkor and the prayers that we will say in a few moments in memory and in honor of our loved ones who are no longer here.

What if we would write letters to those we remember today? What would we tell them about our lives since they passed away? What are the times we think of them? What are the special moments we still remember? If the one hundred people who wrote letters to their loved ones who died on September 11<sup>th</sup> can do so, then we can too. Maybe it is time to put down on paper the memories we have so that we could share them.

Isn't that what Yizkor is all about? Isn't that the whole purpose of this ritual? To remember. To never forget. To find a way to still communicate. That is what the letter of legacy could be. It helps us put on paper so much of what is in our heart; the stories, the emotions, the memories. The things they missed and the things we wish we could still say.

When we come to Yizkor, I often encourage us to not only look back to those who came before us but also to look ahead to a time when we will not be here and others will gather for Yizkor in our memory.

Maybe the concept of legacy letters could be used not only to honor the past but also to honor the future. What if we could write a legacy letter that was a true legacy - the thoughts we want future generations to have – the thoughts we want our children and grandchildren and great grandchildren to read when we are no longer here. What would we say to future generations that we choose to not say in person? What memories do we want them to have 20, 30, 50 or 100 years from now? What ways can we tell our loved ones that they are just that; loved very much and wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to say that after we have left this earth. I think we can.

Members of this congregation have written letters just like this that they have given to me to share with their family only after they have passed away. I encourage you to consider doing the same thing. Help the future generations by telling them what they need to know. It allows us to leave our legacy. We have an opportunity to leave our legacy in our actions and in our words. Many of us have thought about ways to leave a legacy financially – others have written their ethical will and shared with their families what they want at the end of their lives. I want us to consider writing a legacy letter to our loved ones in the future so that they will have a

tangible way to prepare for new challenges in life and have a tangible way to remember what we felt was most important.

We can do this in words and we can do this in action. Some of us are leaving a legacy through a financial pledge to The Jewish Center through our Life and Legacy Program that I would be happy to talk with anyone about. We are honored that over 30 families have already made a commitment to leave a financial legacy to this congregation through our Life and Legacy Program. That is a conversation we can have at another time after the holiday.

Today on this sacred day of Yom Kippur, let's think more about how we want to live and how important it is to share lessons with our loved ones after we die. Let's think about our own legacy and what we want to say to the future generations. Also, as we remember our loved ones today, what do we wish we could say to them? What are the updates in people's lives we need to tell them? What are the accomplishments and disappointments that they need to know? What are the words of appreciation and support that we want to share?

On the High Holidays, some people go to the cemetery to visit their parents and loved ones to have the conversation there. Others may write their thoughts in the legacy letters. We are here today to pray; to express our emotions; to support one another and to remember the previous generations.

Yizkor – to remember – to leave an impression – to contemplate how we want to be remembered

L'dor VaDor – It's time for Yizkor – It's time to remember.

Hazzan Dulkan sing L'Dor VaDor again at the end