

Yom Kippur Day 5770
Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills
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I remember the strangest, most random things from my childhood. I remember being dressed in my shorts with a bowtie and sport-coat when I was three in Fort Ticonderoga, New York, waiting for my brothers to get out of the pool at the motel, and I tried to see how close I could come to the edge of the pool without falling in...I found out.

I remember my frog winning the frog jumping contest when I was five at Camp Shalom, I cried I was so happy. I remember the first day of fifth grade, when I wore some kind of safari shirt, complete with belt..I loved that shirt...some kid (who I can't remember) made fun of me. I never wore that shirt again.

I have other memories, too, great memories with the people I love. I have memories of my mother kissing my forehead on Shabbat...the first time I drove with my dad on a rainy night to Close Encounters of the 3rd kind in a loud red VW 412...the first time I saw my wife at Hevrat Ha Noar, a small retreat center in Jerusalem, just two counselors of teen trips to Israel, she was standing in the doorway with her arms against the doorposts, observing...the first day I sat behind my desk here at Emanuel, ah yes, there was a lot room on that desk, the first and last time it was tidy...I remember almost every time I've injured myself – and other people's injuries, and the little stories that go along with them. I have memories from camps, schools, vacations, sports games, music concerts – images that I can see, like a private YouTube in my head. I'm sure that during this talk, you, too, have conjured up images from your own childhood and beyond.

A lot of my memories, are when I've been humiliated, embarrassed, messed up, or done someone wrong. Sometimes those memories get more screen time in my mind – and I forget the positive moments that I've had – but I'm lucky...through my work here, as I continue to find my way through the Torah, I am constantly reminded to remember the good, live with joy, to choose life and to stay positive (still have my bracelet on). And we all have Yom Kippur, this time, to think about this year's not-so-positive moments, so we can forgive ourselves through confession and repentance. This day is also a time to recollect the memories of the people who meant the most to us, when memory is all that is left for us.

I have a lot of Jewish memories from my childhood and adulthood. I remember sitting with my grandmother at services, and her passing me candies with those plastic wrappers, and the playful smile she always had on her face watching me try to unravel them without making too much noise. I remember my Bar Mitzvah, swaying back and forth to Ain Keloheinu at the end like I was James Brown, because I was so full of joy. I remember the feeling, images and fragrance of our

Passover seders over the years. I remember clearly a youth group Havdallah service in the early eighties, sitting in a dark library with high ceilings in the Manor House of camp Eisner in Great Barrington, Mass, when an electricity and shiver went through my body from my toes up to my head from the 200 kids who were singing with such passion that evening. Of course, since coming here, there are so many memories of beautiful moments of birth, marriage, B'nai Mitzvah, and death.

Beautiful moments of death? How can that be? That's an incredibly sad time...and it is... but it is also an incredibly powerful moment of memory. And to see the light in the eye of someone recollecting a person who meant so much to him or her – that has beauty and strength...in those moments I came to understand how important memories are. It is almost as if our lives are made up of actions and moments that lead to memories, but they are not ours alone, they are in the minds eye of everyone who shared them with us.

And so, as I hear the memories of love, family and companionship, quirks, habits and outrageous behavior, I realize that lives are carried forward through memory, that memories keep alive the messages each of us try to pass on to everyone with whom we interact, our ideals, our gratitude, the way we existed, they are inside of the memories. I have to imagine that my selective memories have informed my future, led me to everything that has happened to me and will happen to me. Like when you do something that reminds you of someone – maybe it is the memory of that someone that led you to the action, not the other way around. Our actions come from our experiences, and our experiences are colored by our memories, so that in the end, the memories we carry within us contain inside of them the deep-seated feeling that something will happen. That's hope – memory and hope go together.

Just moments after the destruction of the first Temple in Jerusalem, the Babylonians taunted the Israelites, who were weeping by the rivers of Babylon, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." They mocked. The Israelites respond with a song of memory: "If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I don't remember you, if I don't set Jerusalem above my highest joy." Memory and hope. I will not forget you, and I am hopeful that the memories of you will provide me the hope that I return to you.

We can even go farther back...every year on Passover we are told: "Do not forget that we were slaves in Egypt." Why, so that we will act kindly towards others in the future. We are a people based upon the memory of who we were, what we did, and where we came from so that we can carry within us hope for the future. Over the centuries the hope of Jerusalem was at the forefront of our prayers. The hope for return was answered with the State of Israel (whose national anthem is, of course, entitled "The Hope"). Our holiday calendar is filled with reminders that the world needs to heal, needs to be fixed. We remember the

desecration of the Temple by the Greeks, the destruction of the Temples by the Babylonians and Romans, we remember the expulsions and pogroms and holocaust so that we can keep hope in our hearts that it never happens again.

Our collective Jewish memories provide the possibilities of our future, hoping for a more peaceful world where “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, and they will not know war any more.” This is the collective hope of our people, “that every person shall sit beneath a vine and fig tree.” “The lion shall sit with the lamb.” The ancient images are an endless stream of the hope of the future when the world will be somehow healed, somehow restored to God’s original plan of peace and tranquility – like life in the garden of Eden. By remembering each moment of difficulty, we believe we will someday overcome them all.

Jacob Neusner, one of the most published Jewish authors, writes concerning memory: *"Memory is an act that is contemporary, calling up the past as a player in the acutely present tense of today's world. Not only so, but the climax focuses not on the past but on the future."* Those great stories of our tradition exist because we have made them the collective memory of our people, and inside of the telling of those stories are the lives of millions of individuals that have come before us, and their memories have led us to this moment in history.

Look around, how many people do you recognize? Maybe just a couple, maybe a lot, but you know what? Right now is our memory, every moment is moving from present to future leaving it in the past, and we’re sharing it. All of you will share the same memory that you’ve forgotten the sermon from this year, but you remember it was great. This experience is part of the collective memory of the Jewish people, and yet, at the same time implanted into our own individual memories as well. The music, the powerful way Cantor Kliger sang Kol Nidre, the choir, the light shining in through the stained glass windows, the colors, everything, it has already entered our memories and become a part of our lives, we are all sharing it – and it doesn’t matter if you are a congregant of Temple Emanuel, a non-congregant, a relative or friend of someone, more traditional, less traditional, it doesn’t matter if you are not Jewish, we are all sharing the memory of today, every person – and that memory is a collective memory of this Jewish community. And because of this memory, there will be more experiences here in this sanctuary. We know it, because we remember now, and the strength of that memory gives us hope that it will happen again.

Memory and hope go together. The memories of the beautiful, the ugly, the stressful and the effortless, the hilarious and the deeply sad, once transmitted to others, become a part of the future as well as the past. Our existence here today is by the grace of the memories of those who came before us, and because of our memory from today, others will sit here after us. The memories we carry today, give us hope for tomorrow.