

## Going Home Again

Yom Kippur *Yizkor* 5775

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We have come to our spiritual home this Yom Kippur. In the words of *Gates of Repentance*, we are here at the Temple to answer “a summons as exalting and enduring as the everlasting hills.” At this hour of remembrance, we have also come home to places in our personal histories. We return to moments shared with a spouse, whose love gave meaning to our lives, but who lives in this world no more. We reflect on years nurtured by dear parents, who shaped our own lives, but who no longer live on Earth. We remember who we were with the grandparents who *kvelled* over us, who saw their future in us, but are not here to see the adults we continue to become. Some go back to a time with a child who was their own promise of a bright future, a child who lives no more.

Our culture might dismiss such remembrance as “living in the past.” We are told, “Life is for the living,” and that we need to get on with life quickly after the death of a loved one. “After all,” we have heard ourselves say, “That’s what he (or she) would want.” Our initial Jewish mourning period is seven days. It’s called *shiva*, which means “seven.” In practice, though, “*shiva*” is often shortened to three days, one day, or even an hour or two. Most of us return to work or school, to our regular activities, as though nothing has happened, “getting on with life,” even soon after the death of a dearly beloved family member.

But we do come for this hour, a time for worshipful remembrance, a moment to acknowledge what we have truly lost. We take the time to shed a tear and to recall a meaningful moment with a departed loved one. We return, however momentarily, to who we were when that loved one was yet at our side.

Last spring, David Brooks wrote a column about the meaning and inspiration that could be derived from going home again, from going back to moments in our formative past. Brooks was moved to share his thoughts after hearing a meaningful message from what some may think an unlikely source, the rock star Sting:

“He talked about his rise to stardom and then about a period in middle age when he was unable to write any new songs. The muse abandoned him, he said — for days, then weeks, then months, then years.

But then he went back and started thinking about his childhood in the north of England. He’d lived on a street that led down to a shipyard where some of the world’s largest ocean-going vessels were built.

Most of us have an urge, maybe more as we age, to circle back to the past and touch the places and things of childhood. When Sting did this, his creativity was reborn. Songs exploded from his head.”

In these moments of *yizkor*, we may go home again, if only for a moment. More important, may our minds journey back to life with those who have gone before inspire us to write new songs, as it were, to create new moments of meaning in our lives.

Recalling the tender love of a spouse, at our side no more, we may seek to infuse this New Year with love. Some will find a new partner; more will not, many because they aren’t seeking one. Still, all can find inspiration from the past to find a variety of new loves. Recalling the blessing of a loving

partner, we can value companionship enough to be a good friend, to build new, if entirely different, experiences, of love.

Remembering a parent or grandparent who valued our Jewish heritage, and ensured that it was shared with us, we may find new paths to deepen our connection to our Tradition this year. By returning home to warm Jewish memories of the past, created by those who are no longer here to make them special, we can heed the call to “sing a new song unto God,” inspired by the past and relevant to our own lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Some are reflecting on the life of a loved one or friend who was unfailingly kind, who never spoke an unkind word, and who never gossiped or told lies. By returning home to our admiration of those righteous souls who went before us, we may be moved to more ethical and moral living in the year ahead.

Others call to mind a dear one whose generosity was unparalleled. Some were magnificently philanthropic. For others, charity was primarily practiced at home. By returning, however briefly, to life in their midst, *yizkor* can inspire our own impulse to be generous with our time, with our talent, and with our treasure.

Brooks writes: “Going back is a creative process. The events of childhood are like the Hebrew alphabet; the vowels are missing, and the older self has to make sense of them.” As we remember, we have the opportunity to “fill in the blanks.” The lives we make for ourselves in 5775 will be new. Still, if we will go home again, if we will permit memory to intrude upon modernity, our future will be better served, our lives will be more meaningful, and our new songs, like Sting’s, will “explode from our heads.”

Let this hour be a magnificent moment of memory. Let our departed loved ones come to life for us again, if only for a moment. Let them inspire us, not to live exactly as they did, but to make their memories meaningful in our own lives, new every day.

Then, these minutes of journeying home will make a difference. Then, truly, will the memories of our loved ones be a blessing.

Amen.