

Shavuot Yizkor 2016

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick 6/13/16

Music has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. Growing up, my father always had music playing in the house and I especially remember him recording the Sunday morning radio concerts of the Philadelphia Orchestra on the old WFLN. He would carefully type out labels for his cassette tapes and then file them in brief cases so he could listen to them later. He loved the sound of sound, and was what one would call an "audiophile." A good stereo was always an important priority to my father, and the same is true with me. I love music, and I love the sound of sound, the sound of a good recording.

My father had an awesome record collection, many of which I still have and still play. I used to love coming home from school, sitting in his chair, and listening to his albums - most classical and jazz. Once, years ago, I was listening to an album of his, one he had had for a very long time. It was a classical music concert and was a fine recording. Unfortunately, near the end of the album side, the record skipped and started playing the same note over and over again. Soon after, my Dad came home from work and I told him about the scratch in the album and how it had skipped right near the end. I told him how disappointing it was to have listened to this beautiful, lush music, only to have it marred by the scratch in the final minute. From one audiophile to another I said, "That scratch ruined the whole performance for me!" And of course I expected my Dad to agree - how could anyone LIKE a scratch in an album? But he surprised me and said, "Ruined EVERYTHING?! No, it didn't. The whole performance was basically over by the time you heard the scratch, and you enjoyed the album didn't you? It only ruined the last two minutes." And he was right. It had been a great album and I had enjoyed 98% of it. And yet, my memory of the experience was only of the last minute or two, and the scratch eclipsed all the enjoyment of the record I had had before.

I think we have all had that experience before. The whole vacation was great, but one lousy day and that's what you remember... Great food in the restaurant, but one rude waiter ruined the "whole experience." Really? Did you not enjoy the food before that? But that is indeed the way we think; it is the way we remember.

Did you know that there is no word in Hebrew for "history?" The authors of the modern language of Hebrew had to borrow the word "historia," because most of modern Hebrew is based on the Bible. There is no biblical word for history. The word "memory", however, is mentioned 169 times in the Bible. Clearly memory is more powerful in our lives than history is. Why? It's because history is someone else's story, but MEMORY is MY story. In other words, we are the ones who actually write and chronicle our own history based on what we choose to remember. History is the story of a past that is dead. Memory is our carrying the past with us and bringing it with us into the future.

And so the question is: What do you **want** to remember? Not what do you remember, but what do you WANT to remember and carry with you, now and in the future? Most of the time that decision is made subconsciously. Some things stick in our mind more than others. And yet, at moments like this, when we approach Yizkor, we realize that we in fact can and do shape our own memories; and those memories become our story. Still, the default memories are

often those that stand out because they are negative. We remember the scratch and not all the beautiful music that came before it. But what do you really WANT to remember?

All life ends in loss, but not all memories need be of loss. All love that ends in loss inevitably leads to suffering, but memory need not be of suffering, either. Memory is not history. History is someone else's story. Memory is ours. Memory is what we carry with us. And so we ask, "What memories do you want to carry with you?" Or, more importantly, "What memories would those we mourn really WANT us to remember?" It's not the scratches they'd want remembered: not harsh words or disagreements; not pain associated with illness; it is not for their weakest moments that our loved ones would want to be remembered. No, they would want to be remembered at their best, and for their best. And we want to carry what was good and great, and the best about them with us. For when we do, they continue to be part of our story. They are alive and vibrant in our souls so long as their lives continue to touch ours. All lives are marred by scratches, but our memories should be of the sweet music that lingers on...