

Yom Kippur Yizkor 5781 – Say Their Names

Rabbi Marc Israel

I won't be continuing my talk from this morning, as we come to Yizkor, there is one more aspect of the Black Lives Matter movement that I do want to address. Specifically, how and why did this take hold at this moment? The issues are not new issues. The Movement is not a new movement. It is not the first time we have seen protests. But it is the first time, that we have seen it grab America's attention and do so for a sustained manner in a way that we haven't seen previously. Some say it is the quarantine – we have been locked at home so long that we would do anything just to go out. Perhaps it is the forthcoming election. There are any other number of reasons that people have suggested, but I believe it comes down to three simple words. Say Their Name.

Say Their Name is the refrain that we have heard over and over again at the protests. And it is such a powerful statement. It is one thing to get people passionate about an issue or an idea. It is different to get people to be passionate when it feels more personal. It is not just about an issue, but a specific person, a specific life that was taken. When we have a name, then we have a face, siblings and parents and children - the abstract becomes quite real.

The power of the name is something that Judaism has long understood. It is the first power given to Adam, to name each of the animals. We see it in the Torah when God changes the names of Avram to Avraham, from Sarai to Sarah and from Ya'akov to Yisrael. We see it at every baby naming and bris, when parents will bestow upon their newly born child the name of a loved one. Often parents will bless the child with the hopes that they will carry on some attribute of the legacy of their beloved departed ones. And we see it when someone dies. We don't just recite a general memorial prayer, we insert the person's name in our El Malei or, today, at Yizkor. By reciting their names, we not only give honor to our loved one, but it evokes within us powerful memories of time spent with them, things that they taught us, meals that we shared. There is a power in Saying Their Name.

In my article that appeared in a summer Bulletin, I was recounting some of the aspects of this past year and I included the number of funerals that I did. But it wasn't the number of funerals that was challenging. It was the life stories of each of the people. They were parents, aunts and uncles, some of whom died after a long full life, some much younger. These were our friends, people who we have known for decades, people who we may have sit next to on the High Holidays of years passed.. They were our spouses, who passed far too young. They are our siblings, some of whom left behind young children. And, in some cases, tragically, they were our children, something a parent should never have to witness. We know these people, we know their names and when we Say Their Names, we are overcome by the love we shared with them. When we Say Their Name, we admit that they are not here physically sitting with us, but their spirit still remains and sustains. When we Say Their Name we tell them and we tell ourselves that they are remembered.

The act of Saying Their Name is the purpose of Yizkor and perhaps the reason why this service holds such power over so many Jews in a way that many other rituals do not. We Say Their Name and we remember their very essence, we remember the good times and bad, the fun and the sad. When we say their name, they become real again, even if only for a moment. When we say their name, we can almost feel their breath upon us. And so now I want to say the names of those who died in this past year, since last Yom Kippur, whose memory we lovingly call to mind. I will begin first with the members of our synagogue and pause between each one, allowing each of us to spend a moment thinking about their life and what they meant to us. And then I will continue and add to them the names of relatives of our members who died this year, providing their loved ones a moment to reflect.

Otila Levi	former member	mother	Ron Levi
Phyllis Zusman	former member	self	Children
Jacob Armoza	member	husband	Harriet Armoza
Ron Meyers	member	son	Julia and Martin Meyers
Rob Agus	member	husband	Cantor Rochelle Helzner
Fredalyn (Freddi) Pleet	member	sister	Joel Kahn
Karen Lipsy	member	wife	Barry Lipsy
Stanley Nasoff	member	husband	Shirley Nasoff
Lillian Feingold	member	self	
Paul Altman	member	husband	Barbara Altman
David Harris	member	husband	Sara Harris
Dorothy Regensteiner	member	self	Children
Dr. Sondra Warren Levin	member	wife	Ronald Levin
David Stuart Pearl		brother	Nancy Solomon
Maurice Kahn		father	Steve Kahn
David Shedroff		father	Amy Matathias
Arthur Bowen		brother	Julius Bowen
Philip Warren, MD		father	Sondra Levin
Carol Meiselman		step mother	David Meiselman
David Kline		mother	Shelley Kline
David Benjamin Grishman		brother	Melanie Grishman
Rheta Kruger		sister	Harriet Armoza
Rheta Kruger		sister	Elaine Krichevsky
Charles Benesch		father	Bryan Benesch
Hase Marie Hershbaum		mother	Moira Green
Martin Robinson		brother	Roberta Helzner
Marjorie Kaiz Offer		sister	Jerry Kaiz
Simone Lempert		mother	Stuart Lempert
Elaine "Elly" Feder Alford		mother	Lisa Ehrlich
Jerome Joseph Simon		father	Andrea Kronzek
Vera Israel		grandmother	Rabbi Marc Israel
Robert M. Minkoff		father	Rachel Loving
Dorothy Marder		mother	Naomi Baer

I want to close with one of my favorite poems, from the Israeli poet Zelda, which so beautifully captures the meanings of our names.

EACH OF US HAS A NAME

Each of us has a name
given by God
and given by our parents

Each of us has a name
given by our stature and our smile
and given by what we wear

Each of us has a name
given by the mountains
and given by our walls

Each of us has a name
given by the stars
and given by our neighbors

Each of us has a name
given by our sins
and given by our longing

Each of us has a name
given by our enemies
and given by our love

Each of us has a name
given by our celebrations
and given by our work

Each of us has a name
given by the seasons
and given by our blindness

Each of us has a name
given by the sea
and given by
our death.

Whether their loss was recent or from longer ago, lets all now take a moment to Say Their Names, as we recite the Yizkor prayers on pages 291 and 292