



Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.

Series III: The Temple Tifereth-Israel, 1946-1993, undated.

Sub-series B: Sermons, 1950-1989, undated.

Reel
63

Box
20

Folder
1278

Yom Kippur sermons, 1984.

Yom Kippur Sermon
Daniel Jeremy Silver
October 5, 1984

The year was 1939. Europe was about to go up in flames, and the Jews of Europe were about to be consigned to the flames.

In Palestine the Yishuv was struggling valiantly to maintain itself. The Halutzim were working ~~side by side~~ day in and day out, draining the swamps, clearing the fields and building the cities, while night in and night out they patrolled the perimeters of their settlement to protect them from attack. What time they had left was spent overcoming the studied difficulties which the British put in their way.

It was during these difficult months just before the second World War that the future Nobel Laureate, Shmuel Yosef Agnon, published a short story which he called Mi-Dirah Le-Dirah, which might be translated 'From Apartment to Apartment' or 'From Lodging to Lodging.' In this story Agnon raised the question, where can a human being find the serenity, the peace of mind, the calm, which is suggested when we speak of home.

The narrator in this story is a middle-aged man who lives in Jerusalem. He suffers from a lingering illness and consequent weakness and fatigue. His doctor doesn't really know what to prescribe, so he suggests a change of scenery. The narrator agrees, but makes a strange choice of place. He goes to the coast, but instead of taking a room in a rest house on the beach he rents a small, rather dingy apartment in the noisiest, most crowded quarter of Tel Aviv, behind the bus station. It is a noisy place. Bus engines can be heard day and night as well as the sounds of people crowding to get on the vehicles.

To complete the scene, there's a small child in the house, a little boy, rather unappealing, the son of the landlady. She is away all day at some work and he crawls about after the narrator, whining, reaching up with his arms, wanting to be picked up and be played with. This is hardly an ideal place for rest and recuperation.

Friends too to visit. They are understandably appalled at the situation,

and without telling the narrator, they make a reservation for him in a guest house on a kibbutz some distance away. Armed with the reservation, they plead with him to go, and finally he assents. He actually makes the journey to the guest house, it's everything that they told him it would be, but he finds he can't unpack. He keeps seeing the little tyke reaching up his arms, wanting to be picked up and be played with. He picks up his bags and returns to that apartment in Tel Aviv.

He finds the child crying. He picks him up and rocks him to sleep. Then he goes into his own room, stretches out on his bed and falls into the first, deep, refreshing sleep that he has known in a long, long time, "Sleep, gentle sleep, nature's soft nurse."

Agnon's stories are compelling and, like the works of any serious writer, they speak to us on a number of different levels. To his fellow halutzim Agnon spoke directly about their immediate situation. The narrator represents the Yishuv. The Yishuv is weary, bone tired. The letters they receive from family and friends are full of advice: 'take a rest,' 'find some relief.' 'A few days off and a change of scenery will help.' But instead of going to the sea coast, to some place of leisure, the Yishuv represented by the narrator goes to the center of a crowded city. The crowded city represents Europe. The buses and the crowds, eager to board, represent the urgent search of Jews for escape. The young child wanting to be picked up stands for the Jews of all ages, reaching out for succor and support. Instead of taking a vacation from the hard work of pioneering, the Yishuv undertakes the work of redemption, the life-saving effort which must be undertaken.

Agnon also makes the point that those who cry out to be rescued are not always grateful or even pleasant. The youngster is unappealing. When he is picked up, he keeps putting his fingers in the narrator's eyes. Many of those whom the shelihm tried to help were anything but grateful. The rescuers were risking their lives, but some of those who needed help kept complaining: "We don't want Palestine. We want to go to the United States."

Week after week, month after month, men and women left the shores of Palestine for Warsaw, Budapest, Frankfurt and Berlin, the crowded cities, to save a few brands from the fire. It is hard, dangerous work. From time to time friends suggest 'take a rest.' The rescuers are bone tired. A rest, the guest house, seems appealing. The narrator is tempted, but he finds that he cannot turn his back on the work of redemption and returns to the city and the child.

I have always been grateful that I was nurtured by a tradition, our tradition, which had raised compassion to a high art. Perhaps we are as we are because the Jewish people have had a rough journey and we have learned long since that the one whom we helped today may be the one who helps us tomorrow. Whatever the reason, we find God's most precious attributes as Rahum v'hanun, a merciful, gracious, compassionate God and our teachers admonish us to imitate God as best we can and exhibit in our lives the attributes of mercy and compassion. The work of redemption is to be our work. A Jewry, our Jewry, which lived through the years of the Holocaust and the dislocations which overwhelmed Jewish life throughout the world after the second World War; a Jewry, our Jewry, which hears the cries of Jews of Russia despite their enforced silence; a Jewry, our Jewry, which know the desperation of the Falashas in the back hills of Ethiopia who seek ~~only~~ to be redeemed from that war-torn and unfriendly land; this Jewry, our Jewry, understands that we cannot harden our heart, turn our back and be indifferent. The work of redemption needs to be done.

One of the most compelling features of Agnon's story is that the narrator who undertakes the work of redemption is not pictured as a young, bold and robust man. He is not one of the wealthy or the powerful of the world. He is not a hero type. He is middle-aged, bone-weary and ill. Many mistakenly think of the work of redemption as a task reserved for those who are full of strength, youth and energy. You had to be healthy and strong to lead families across the Alps, but Agnon reminds us in this way that the work of redemption takes place on many levels and is everyone's everyday responsibility.

I frequently visited a woman in the hospital who had cancer. She was often weak from radiation therapy and yet, whenever a newly diagnosed patient came on the floor she would turn to the nurse and say, 'will you see if I can go in and talk with her. She'll understand that I understand.' She would go in and her strength gave strength. Hers was the work of redemption.

I often think of my mother. When my father died, Mother could have withdrawn into widowhood, as so many do; but instead, much like the protagonist in the Agnon story, she went into the center of this city into one of its most crowded, noisiest places and picked up the children who were reaching out to be lifted and taught them to read. The parallel is remarkably clear. As long as her health allowed her to drive into the city to teach, to reach, to love, her days had a zest, life. It was only when she could no longer pick up and love those children that age really began to overwhelm her.

One of the most beautiful of the phrases which were beloved of the rabbis is this one: ha-geulah ba'ah kimah kimah - "redemption comes bit by bit," as each and everyone of us does his bit. When we stop to listen to another's ~~grief~~ and comfort them, when we take a confused and troubled soul by the hand and lead it through a difficult patch, when we bind the wounds of another's hurt or encourage someone to stay steady, when we offer companionship to the silent suffering, friendship to the lonely - that is the work of redemption.

I have often felt that the classic perceptual mistake of our age is the common assumption that there are shortcuts to redemption. The work of redemption is slow, painstaking work. Our century has seen many redeemers and liberators who overthrew the tyrannies of the past. In Russia, the Czar was overthrown; in China, the war lords; throughout the Third World, the colonial powers. These visionaries were able to overthrow their privileged overlords, but when they tried to restructure their society, they found that their followers were not tractable. Frustrated, many tried to force their vision into a reality and became tyrants themselves. They had a plan to which they were passionately committed, but the

human being is an obstinate and obdurate creature and human nature is full of contradictions. It was easy to overthrow feudal or colonial ruler; not so easy to create a just and gracious social order. Frustrated at almost every turn, many of these impatient folk found that the only way they could impose redemption upon their community was to use force and in relatively short order many became tyrants as fearsome to their people as the tyrants they had deposed. Redemption comes bit by bit.

It is useful to compare Israel's socialist kibbutzim and the socialist governments of Eastern Europe. Both societies are based on similar theories. Both derived their socialism from the same texts, but there similarity ends. In the case of Eastern Europe economic measures were imposed by governmental power and the socialism that emerged became a prison for millions. The kibbutzim may not be paradise, but they are graceful institutions. People live there voluntarily. They establish their own goals and their own forms. They take the time, bit by bit, to work out the construction of their society. They take the time, bit by bit, to work out in a democratic way the relationships of authority, power and responsibility.

One of the values of Yom Kippur, one of the reasons for its impact, is that for twenty-four hours we are told that we can't claim the support of our political and social ideologies and principles. We can't justify ourselves before God on Yom Kippur with the plea, 'I did it all for my particular ideology.' God does not ask you today, what party do you belong to? Do you believe in this five-year plan or that new economic order? God asks: did you love? Did you care? Did you take the time? Did you offer yourselves? Were you patient? Did you offer comfort? Did you encourage? Did you smile? On Yom Kippur we cannot justify the manipulation of others, the abuse of privilege or indifference to family on the claim that we were working for some good cause. However just as in our professions, it is our actions which are weighed.

Years ago when I was in the seminary one of my teachers tried to convince us that the truth of Yom Kippur was summed up in a single Talmudic phrase: Gedolah teshuvah she-mitkarevet et ha-geulah, "teshuvah is great because it draws near redemption." For some years I tended to dismiss this phrase as just a bit of rabbinic rhetoric, but the more I have come to understand Yom Kippur the more I understand what was meant. Teshuvah is what Yom Kippur is all about, and teshuvah does bring nearer the redemption for which we pray. How so? Teshuvah reminds us of the way we should be living our lives. During the course of any year we are bent this way and that. We tend to lose our sense of direction, to develop bad habits and facile rationalizations for these habits. We need a time such as this for contrition, for confession, for repentance, to refocus our lives. Teshuvah comes from a root which means to turn. We need this time to turn to God; to return to the good, ~~the~~ the straight way; to return to ourselves.

In the Agnon story the narrator had a choice, to turn into the guest house or to return to the crowded city and the child who reached up for love. He returned to the city. I would suggest that we are given that same choice and that most of us have chosen the guest house. Indeed, I am convinced that when social historians set down the record of our times they will point to a phenomenon which I call distancing as the most salient feature of Western civilization in the twentieth century. Throughout most of this century we have been distancing ourselves physically, emotionally and psychologically from the city, from the family, from intimate relationships, from God; yes, even from ourselves - turning ourselves away from.

Think back just a few generations. People lived in tenements in crowded cities, parents and children in the same room, the elderly, the ill, even the mentally disturbed, under one roof. In the villages of eastern Europe families often shared their one room with their animals. Look at us now, from the city streets to the suburb, from the suburb to the exurb - the further away from the city the better. From tenement to single family home to gracious apartment, of

of course, with a guard gate. Our fathers often lived above their shop and the family shared responsibility for tending that shop. As soon as we could we separated, distanced, the work place from the home place. As prosperity came into our society, privacy became the standard; every child his own room, parents their own apartment, an old folks' home for the elderly.

The extended family became the nuclear family, distancing. The nuclear family became the single parent family, distancing. Everyone had their own work to do and their separate schedule, distancing. Children were encouraged to be independent, to go their own way, distancing. The generational gap became something we built on, distancing. The elderly were put into old folks' homes, distancing. The ill were sent to the hospitals, distancing. All about us the sense of separation. In part, distancing represented an attempt to provide a measure of comfort and grace, but inevitably, it touched the soul. That's why it's worth speaking of on a night such as this.

We have come close to becoming a generation of isolates, a people who have turned away from everyone, who no longer share. A young couple came to see me. They were planning their wedding. They wanted to be sure that I would not include the phrase, "until death do us part." I told them I did not use that phrase, but I wondered why they were so determined on this score. Their answer, "We'll take each day as it comes" - distancing. Our ferocious commitment to independence has caused us to lose the sense that there are certain bedrock relationships which are inviolate.

We were at one of those affairs organized to promote a worthy cultural institution. The room was filled with people, some of whom I know, some of whom I had never met before. The common denominator was that we shared an interest in that particular cultural undertaking. He was about forty, a professional. We had never met, but when he found out that I was a rabbi he wanted to talk. He talked of many things, among them that he had never married. "Not that I haven't had the opportunity. There have been several women that I thought were

right for me, but you know, I never could free myself of an image of my mother. I was eight when my father left the house. She cried for a month. I can still see her tears. Every time I thought, 'perhaps,' I see those tears" - distancing. Isolates.

Agnon's narrator turned towards, and we have turned away. Agnon's narrator went into the crowded center of the city. When a child reached up he lifted the child. When we know of trouble in a home, we send a social worker. When we hear of trouble in the world, we send our money. We don't go ourselves, distancing.

What happens when you turn away, when you become a separate and an isolate, when you can no longer feel comfortable within those bedrock relationships which are the relationships that give stability and serenity to life? The spirit shrivels. The soul is diminished.

The Talmud contains an interesting precursor of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Rip Van Winkle story. The protagonist of the Talmud's story is a rabbinic scholar, Honi, a character about whom many tall tales were told. Honi taught in an academy in a city in the Galilee. One day he decided to take a walk in the countryside. On his walk he came across an old man planting saplings. "What are you doing?" "Why do you ask?" "Because you're an old man, you'll never live to see these saplings become trees." God overheard this conversation and decided to teach Honi a lesson. Honi was put to sleep for seventy years, and then God awakened him. Honi went back to his town and looked for his home. The home was no longer there. He asked passersby about his wife and his son. They had heard of people by that name, but they had died long since. He went to the lecture hall of the school which he had founded and announced himself to the porter. The porter laughed in his face and closed the door. Honi turned to God and prayed for death.

After the storyteller finished his tale, a well-known Babylonian rabbi, Rabbah, commented in the Eastern Aramaic of his day, O Hevrutei, o Miytatei, "either community or death" - either intimacy or death. The isolate is one of the

living dead. Perhaps that is too strong a statement, but how many of those who have separated themselves from all others have found happiness? How many of those for whom independence is the ultimate virtue lead fulfilled lives? Comfort, they have. Happiness, they do not have. When I look at the statistics of nervous breakdowns, of addiction, of divorce, of family breakup, at every one of the indices of disintegration, I am reminded that separation is not the way to happiness. Why? Because only as you turn to others is your life in any meaningful way fulfilled. When the narrator picked up the child and the child went to sleep in his arms, he was able finally to sleep the refreshing sleep that gives strength.

Yom Kippur speaks of repentance. Repentance is a theme shared by most of the religions of mankind. Everyone has experienced the pangs of conscience, guilt. People want to be at one again with their God. But note that alone among the great religions of the world, Judaism never encouraged people to make ceremonial repentance a full-time undertaking. Medieval histories describe bands of Christian penitents who crawled on their knees from shrine to shrine with a beggar's bowl in their hands, sometimes asking people to beat them on their backs. Their life was a lifelong ritual of penitence. Medieval Islam knew groups very much like these. That is not the Jewish way. Our way is to concentrate on Teshuvah and to do so on this one day. The rest of the year we concentrate on love, care and comfort, healing, help, support and encouragement, the consequences of Teshuvah. We repent and then return to our families and the work of redemption.

Think of yourselves as the narrator in Agnon's story. Your choice is his choice: to turn to the green places, the adult playgrounds of our world or to turn to the city, to the work of redemption. Will you choose the life of an isolate or to live in and among the human family, a life of comfort or the life of contact? People are cantankerous, restless, difficult, demanding. To live with and among is not easy. Involvement will limit your privacy and intrude on your schedule. But to turn to people is the only way known to stay human.

My message this Yom Kippur is a simple one. Turn back. Instead of distance, closeness; instead of indifference, love; instead of alienation, God.



Yom Kippur Announcements

October 6, 1984

MORNING - BRANCH

A DISCUSSION on Yom Kippur themes, based on readings on repentance, will be with Rabbi Susan Berman in the Lounge of the Main Temple today beginning at 12:30. A discussion will continue until the afternoon services begin.

A CHILDREN'S service will be held today at the Main Temple at 1:30. Parents are requested to sit with their children. A pre-school experience for children ages four through six will be held in the Social Hall of the Main Temple at the same time. Parents are requested to bring pre-schoolers to the Social Hall and to leave them with our staff. After the Children's Service they may pick up their pre-schoolers in the Social Hall.

AFTERNOON SERVICES will be held at 2:45 P.M. today at the Main Temple only and will be followed by the Yizkor (Memorial) Service.

May I remind you THE DOORS OF THE TEMPLE will be closed at the start of the Memorial Service and will remain closed until the end of the day.

The Temple Young Associates will decorate the sukkah and hold a family Sukkot celebration at the Branch on Wednesday, October 10, beginning at 4:30 P.M. Families will provide their own picnic suppers. Beverage and dessert will be provided.

SUKKOT SERVICES will be held on Thursday, October 11, 10:30 A.M., at the Branch. Members of the Temple Seniors group will conduct the service. Rabbi Berman will speak, Kiddush will follow in the outdoor sukka. After service the Seniors will enjoy lunch and a program.

CONSECRATION AND SIMHAT TORAH services will be held at 10:30 A.M. on Thursday, October 18, at The Temple Branch.

4
If there is where you find peace and refuge and rest, where is
there? Agnes's answer is that there is ^{wherever} you share with
God us. No work or occupation - there is where we are united
to the old making out for an hour or so. In 1939 there was
a 100 member fund set up for the Home of the Holy Spirit 10% of 1000's
left in the area to be put up & sold. In 1957 there was
a League of Women or Order where the peace of peace and rest
was for spirit and rest - and to live with the peace and rest
to find rest for ourselves to live with the peace and rest
where we can be rest and rest.

Agnes ^{several} ^{in a year} ^{to have} ^{been} ^{developed}
^{several} ^{in a year} ^{to have} ^{been} ^{developed}
lost 2 years ^{ago} ^{into} ^a ^{community} ^{where} ^{it} ^{was} ^{not} ^{impossible}
to be impossible, because by travelling and roughing me
Tougher to live for ourselves to live with the peace and rest

The idea was to live with the peace and rest. From the past we are encouraged
to live with the peace and rest - to live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest
is not a detail, with ourselves to live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest
a kind of peace and rest to live with the peace and rest

There is no one of the peace and rest, because of the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest
we live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest
after with, as Agnes has said to live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest
to live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest
they live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest
there is no one of the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest
they live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest
to live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest
to live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest to live with the peace and rest

rough patch on lake & inferred a desert under on
way on way to Cairo & to Baghdad. Every, with that
was the point of the case of the desert.

DRNP DRNP DRNP DRNP - On 1 the land of an
country has been the feeling that there seemed a lot of
unknown & unknown desert for very little. The desert would be
not slowly and smoothly; not easy to say of DRNP but thought
to restoration of the world order. The Egyptian people,
the new land under overlord, the Egyptian people were
driven out. Liberalism - Restoration seemed to be at hand -
but now much of the world is disrupted since simply
replaced by new Tunisia.

What happens?

Then when I thought to Anglo the order should
be high + valuable desert. But instead I have put it -
restoring to people needs & in order to be - they tried to
force new the country now into the new world order.
Then ^{intention} ~~Anglo~~ ^{for the next part} ~~was~~ ^{immediate}; but then a later ^{period} ~~was~~
can have ~~Anglo~~ ^{Anglo} You with issue restoration -
~~Anglo~~ ~~Anglo~~ ~~Anglo~~

In all, restored restoration and the grounds &
Cairo Egypt spoke to some disputed language - sent
in order to restore the world order and the world
of the world's government subject to restoration never
open, disputed restoration when Anglo has a great deal
of restoration & issue. The Anglo. In Cairo Anglo
restoration is imposed, as one supposed. In the Anglo

Legislation coming in relation to antisemitism & racism in the US
which are ^{in the form} for many decades as antisemitism racism; finally the
legislation; The Holocaust - and genocide, but also a question of
genocide of Jews - as a result of antisemitism to a certain

Y.I.K. and the other around present in the conference in
2018 - September, ^{the} said to speak in the name of the
Terror - Netanyahu would now address the Netanyahu would
be tried and - the program of the machine that would
be coming in power - and to be seen finally only to be
antidiscrimination - but finally the success of 5 years in

Mutual Economic Interest in the end of 2018 - with
a program of 1000 reform
as a result but also program of only discrimination. In
power in Y.K. in the of government in antisemitism but in antisemitism
present in the - which have as a result that are antisemitism

Y.I.K.?

2018 a calendar of the security and legal reform
to be a religion difficult in 2018 2019 2020 2021
Chances is antisemitism, the antisemitism IT brings antisemitism
Netanyahu. In the other hand has to antisemitism antisemitism to
security. Says: 'In a long time last antisemitism antisemitism -
are antisemitism law = police of antisemitism antisemitism antisemitism -
The antisemitism antisemitism law police and in Y.K. - but is antisemitism 364
Days of the antisemitism antisemitism is antisemitism of antisemitism antisemitism & antisemitism
antisemitism, but in the antisemitism antisemitism antisemitism antisemitism antisemitism
the antisemitism antisemitism

2018 is the antisemitism antisemitism antisemitism antisemitism antisemitism
antisemitism. End year the antisemitism antisemitism antisemitism antisemitism antisemitism

[illegible]

20/1/12 - conference - many members today - The names
 to be made in list - The suggestion that we work
 Huddersfield began in Aug and 4 deputies, secretary -
 The suggestion that we bring in some one more
 who knows my home - if we secretary secretary secretary
secretary as a reason to call them secretary secretary secretary
 perhaps suggest that you put in as - if possible
 and have some secretary - secretary secretary secretary
 would come 1 set out a secretary secretary secretary - if we
 children in the year we secretary secretary secretary secretary
 would have had ages - secretary secretary secretary
 you will be secretary

201/111 1001 1001
 1001 1001 1001
 1001 1001 1001
 1001 1001 1001

Went in bank & during the day described the
road to the station to our father - made several
at the same time of our trip - but the signs were
direct to the "Crown Road" was right all the
way to Canada.

Experiment's results close to ~~theory~~ ^{agreement} = a very, useful result (9)
 1.6 at about ~~the same~~ ^{the same} ~~value~~ = ~~most~~

Most I can have down the great house - The rest is the
place you have behind. A new universal container is so well
known of an early as winter, the summer will find it
most desirably features, a process which I feel
DISTANCE'S - a threat to spread under ^{physical} need, content,
& psychologically as much a use as for other -

The most common form of setting is regional. The base
 moved from the united front quasi of base as the relays
 of base camp under 3 years ago and a not near under
 the year. The will show a small near to find and a
it into the a not find near one to a near in 1/2 and
100 will place in

set. The hand held pencil is 7 1/2 inches long and 1 1/2 inches wide. The hand held pencil is 7 1/2 inches long and 1 1/2 inches wide. The hand held pencil is 7 1/2 inches long and 1 1/2 inches wide.

In the wooded area people seen on top of hill - we saw
 three or four houses - near the spring in the park - we saw
 several not out to see here - We could find some, scattered
 on road from the apartment to keep the road cut.

Force of attraction is inversely proportional to the square of the distance between the two masses.

We have taken the usual work of the house
and placed ~~it~~^{us} on

an ~~intended~~ ~~length~~

the ~~last~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~year~~ ~~1~~ ~~year~~ ~~long~~

We have been told
that the house built around out of the house - and

~~Clouds~~ ~~more~~ ~~clouds~~ ~~but~~ ~~by~~ ~~clouds~~ ~~push~~
 clouds ~~now~~ ~~low~~ ~~sun~~ ~~can~~ ~~pass~~ ~~on~~ ~~clouds~~ ~~com~~
~~no~~ ~~longer~~ ~~to~~ ~~exist~~ ~~after~~

The extended period he was to receive from

The number of boys is 66 single parent families

There are also released Golden ^{see} new ^{month} ^{domestic} ^{not}
Golden ^{young} ^{Golden} ^{Golden}

another - to other -

1910 is an idea, it is not a conclusion not
with mind - we did not average over 1 position - ^{12th} ~~20th~~
several - I renew the idea - Take up the idea again -
go on a trip by reference to the past times - 'I' not at
all with idea a turning to left - where need
to the upward of unseen - clearly any for the symbolism &
an emphasis in left

On left side as - we should not - see how
not then any from the world.



Memorial Sermon
Daniel Jeremy Silver
October 6, 1984

When I first began in the rabbinate, death was a subject which most people kept at arm's length. Death was discussed, if at all, in the language of evasion: a friend had "passed on" or "gone ahead." Children were rarely taken to funerals or to visit the dying. When I introduced a unit on death and the customs which surround death into the Confirmation curriculum, a few anxious parents worried aloud that such sessions would give their children nightmares.

The truth, of course, is that the best way to guarantee that a child will have nightmares is to treat death and dying with unnecessary anxiety. The child whose questions go unanswered will conjure up all manner of unreal images. When they are kept from the funeral what can they conclude but that it must be a terrible experience. Evasion always stimulates the darker sides of our imagination. Honesty defuses fears. Discussing death with me they will get time-tested and honest answers to their questions. Allowed to attend the funeral they will be with those they love and hear good words about someone they loved.

Over the years I've tried to understand the need to evade. Obviously, parents felt they were protecting their child. But from what? What became clear was that this pattern of evasion was a relatively new phenomenon. Our ancestors treated death as a natural fact of life just as the leaves fall each autumn so that there is a place for the spring buds. Death took place at home. The family prepared the body. The whole community accompanied the body to its grave. Children were not warned off or walled away.

Believing as they did in the one and only God, our fathers spoke of death as part of God's creative design and dealt with death as an ordinary fact of life. There was only one God. Death was an elemental and essential part of His creative wisdom. "To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the Heavens, a time to be born and a time to die." The

Bible even suggests that the fact that we are conscious of our mortality is a blessing since it sharpens our appreciation of each day. Precisely because the days of our years are numbered and we know it, we treat them as precious moments which are not to be wasted.

How did it happen then that a generation forgot the wisdom of the tradition and began to handle death as a taboo subject? The answer, I believe, lies in the surge of optimism which accompanied the radical transformation of society as we entered the modern world.

The Industrial Revolution created a growing class of the better-off, pleased by their good fortune, who began to believe that it was only a matter of time before everyone enjoyed similar good fortune. Unfortunately, the benefits of progress were as yet unevenly distributed. There were still slums and wage slaves, and those who had become part of the new world didn't want their children's spirit roughened by contact with the cruelties of the past. It became their fixed purpose to create a protected world in which their wives and their young would be free of the evils of the past. Green lawns and iron gates would provide safe and graceful space. Careful courtesy and convention would protect them from offensive behavior and mean speech. Hospitals and old folks' homes took in the ill and the infirm, medicine would do away with sickness, and life expectancy was rapidly increasing. Children needn't face what they might never have to face. Children, particularly, would be protected. These parents invented the nursery. Children ate apart. They even screened the books children read. 'There would be plenty of time later on for the young to learn the hard lessons' - and so storks brought babies and grandparents simply went away.

The pattern of evasion was pervasive in the "better classes" and its unfortunate consequences were everywhere to be seen. Innocence is no preparation for life. Many whose youth was by the standards of the time idyllic ultimately pay a terrible emotional price for this protection. The woman shielded

from decision making, first by a father and then by her husband, was not prepared for the responsibilities of widowhood. The young who had no experience with the opposite sex were ill equipped to choose a suitable mate or for marriage. Young parents who had never been allowed into a sick room could not cope with their feelings when they had to nurse a desperately ill child. When death struck, many were paralyzed by the unexpected rush of grief and the complex of feelings, not to speak of the new responsibilities which they faced.

Emerson was on the mark when he wrote, "I have heard that in horsemanship he is not a good rider who never was thrown, but, rather, that a man will never be a good rider until he is thrown." Through storms we grow. The Psalmist wisely praised God for his bruises as well as his blessings. "It was a good thing that I was bruised because it allowed me to understand the way of the world" (Ps. 119:71).

In recent years the euphemisms have been packed away. Children are no longer sent away during a family's moments of grief and sorrow. We have seen the folly of denying reality. Indeed, I sometimes feel some have abandoned these illusions with such speed and thoroughness that they may have gone too far in the other direction. It's one thing to be honest with the young about a natural fact of life such as death; quite another to make them endure the emotional storms which rage between parents who are not sure who they are, what they believe in, or whether they want to be together.

One generation's reacceptance of the naturalness of death has been due not only to a new realism but to the emergence of a new anxiety. The ancients confronted death. We must confront both death and dying. Mankind has had centuries of experience dealing with death and most cultures have found ways to help people accept their mortality. Death remains unknown and unknowable, but we accept the fact that death is not pain but the cessation of pain, and that in death, as in life, we are with God. But if death is the cessation of pain, dying may involve the prolongation of pain. In death we are with God, but the prolonged process of dying places us under the control of others.

For the most part, death came to our ancestors swiftly, "like an arrow which strikes at noonday." Childbirth, the plague, the wounds of war, killed swiftly. There were few remedies. In our day death comes slowly. Penicillin now controls pneumonia, once the welcome friend of the aged. The fathers rarely knew if a disease was fatal. Our diagnostic techniques can pass a sentence of death on those who do not even recognize that they are ill. Today many must live with the knowledge that those they love are dying, that dying will be a long process, and that there is little they can do but love and care.

Our ancestors accepted death because it was natural - from God. Dying in our day of superior medical technology is unnatural, controlled by machines and medicines. The scientist recognizes the pain and anxiety which can accompany care, but insists, and understandably so, that the prolongation of dying is the necessary cost of medical progress; and that because of modern treatment many enjoy months, even years, of capacity they would have otherwise been denied. But for those whose incapacity is bitter and prolonged this is cold comfort. No one wants to be reduced to a mattress grave. The emotional burden is heavy and difficult to bear. The frustrations and anger are real. It is not surprising that for the first time in human history many fear dying far more than death, and that even those of us who believe life is ultimately sacred, seek to understand if there may not, in fact, be a right to die.

Whenever I visit with those whose life has lost much of its quality or those who care for someone burdened by multiple incapacities, I am reminded of a remarkably prescient story reported in the Talmud. This aggadah comes from an age when people were confident that the Angel of Death could not cross the barrier of prayer and so it became the custom to pray all night at the bedside of the critically ill. R. Joshua lay dying. His disciples had gathered in the room next door where they prayed unremittingly for his recovery. Because of their vigil he could not die; the Angel of Death could not cross the barrier of their prayers. Yet, he was in pain and helpless. Finally, a wise and loving

housekeeper could stand it no longer. She went boldly into the prayer room and deliberately interrupted the disciples: 'For what are you praying? You are praying for his agony. He is with God. Let him be.' R. Joshua died and the Talmud praises this lady for her actions.

The Yizkor service is not the time to puzzle out the precise limits we should set on efforts to protract life after capacity has fled. Given the pace of medical research in our day, I doubt that any fully satisfactory formulation is now possible. But of this I am sure; there is a time to say 'enough.' 'Let God take over.'

Yizkor is a moment when we accept again God's wisdom. Yizkor is a personal moment. The service addresses those who grieve, not with logical arguments but with the poetry of faith. There are no explanations, but we can be encouraged. All about us are memories of those who have gone before. We will not be alone. Here we are reminded that death, like life, is ordained by God and that even in the valley of shadows we are with God. Yizkor is a congregational moment. Whatever our grief, we have no reason to feel that we have been singled out or punished. Each of us is a mourner. Each of us is mortal. The answer to the question, 'why me,' is 'why not.' "There is a time to be born and a time to die, a time to laugh and a time to weep."

Yizkor summons us to share ourselves with others. Those who wall themselves away from friends and family when grief or illness strikes not only deny themselves valuable support but deny others a chance to express their humanity.

To live is to be challenged. During a service such as this we remember the many challenges faced by those we loved. Some were forced out of their native land. Some were born into mean surroundings. Some lost their parents when they were children. Some were not allowed to complete their education. Some lost a great love - a child. Some had no choice but to do unsatisfying work. Some were abused by callous employers. Some spent their last months wasting away. At times all of us must endure the force of the storms - depression, war, a fatal accident, an untrustworthy friend, illness, age. Those we remember now with

greatest respect are those who met their challenges steadily. Looking back on their lives, we recognize that they grew through their experience. Looking at our lives, we recognize the possibility of growth.

I have seen the over-protected wife discover her capacity in widowhood; grieving parents devote their lives to help stricken children; adolescents abandon their posturing and acting out when their maturity was required; and I have seen those who live with debilitating illness face the day with composed spirits and develop a wisdom which supported and encouraged others.

When you are deep wounded, remember
The blow strikes flame from the stone,
The stroke that Fate deals you may give you
A beauty you never had known.

The owl was called by the ancients the bird of wisdom because it can see best when it is dark. Yizkor reminds us of the spiritual heroism of which human beings are capable and that we, too, can see in the dark if we only use the eyes of faith.

Daniel Jeremy Silver

October 6, 1984