

Pesah Day 7 Yizkor 5778 **The Dry Land**

How long did it take for the Israelites to cross the Red Sea?

The answer is that the Torah does not tell us, and so people speculate. Depending on how we read the narrative, we can come up with a 12-hour time period. Or perhaps it took all night. Or possibly 24 hours. We simply don't know.

But it is interesting to wonder how time must have felt to an Israelite who was actually crossing the sea. Remember, we know the outcome of the story, but the protagonists did not. We can imagine, perhaps, some of them being held spellbound by the walls of water to their right and to their left. We can imagine others with their eyes firmly fixed to the middle distance. And perhaps we can also imagine others slogging along, neither knowing nor really caring where, or whether, this part of the journey would end, because time had become meaningless.

And time also loses its meaning when a person is grieving. The normal 'plot' of seconds and minutes, hours and days, weeks and months, is constantly intruded upon – by the rituals of mourning, by wildly fluctuating emotions, but most of all by memory. The most trivial things – a bracelet, a golf ball, a handkerchief – can trigger a rush that sweeps us back to the time when that object was used, or held, or given to us, by the person we can no longer thank with a hug and a kiss. And then there is the ricochet – the ebb tide that sweeps us forward again in time, to the present, to the place where we sense all the dimensions of our loss. And like those Israelites tramping through the sea, we feel that it will never end.

Those memories orientate us through our grief, even when it feels endless. And so it is fitting, this morning, that as a community we hold the memories of those who are no longer with us in this world, on this journey.

Karen, you wrote to me about your beloved uncle Bert Snyder, you mom's big brother. You told me how he enlisted at age 17 and fought in the South Pacific. You remember and admire his free spirit, his open-mindedness, his tolerance of others, his love of travel, his culinary skills, his easy-going personality and his beautiful smile which radiates from the photograph you sent me. He was a lover of dogs, a traveler, a volunteer and the founder of an academic scholarship at Norwich College in Vermont. And you said that you treasure the memory of his laugh, his smile and his twinkling, mischievous eyes.

Susan, you sent me a picture of your Mom, Martha Snyder Miller. In it she is proudly standing free of her walker and displaying an award certificate she has obviously just been given. And you accompanied the picture with her favorite prayer:

*The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine upon you
And be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you
And give you peace.*

*So shall they print my name,
You, the children of Israel,
And I will bless them.*

Lis, you wrote to me about your dear sister Hanne – that she was the most amazing person, always with a smile although her life was not easy. She was the most generous in spirit, patient and best friend not only to you but especially to her four children – you would joke and say “In my next life I want to come back as my sister's child!” And you write how terribly you miss her.

Marlene and Reuben, you wrote to me about Reuben's cousin Carolyn who was more like a sister to you both. Carolyn took tender care of Reuben's mother and Marlene felt an instant kinship with her. You shared the story of how she gave you a bag full of bracelets from QVC's sale night – and then did exactly the same thing again three weeks later. And you write how you will always remember her love, kindness and generosity, and that you thank God for her being such an important part of your lives.

And **Ben**, this time last year you were wrestling with the immediate pain and sorrow of your father's death – Eugene Horwitz, Ephraim Zev ben Pinhas HaLevi v'Zelda. This year, you wrote about the special connections with your Dad around sporting events, particularly golf and basketball. You added that your dad loved taking joy from what life could offer and how blessed you feel to have had the opportunity to have many reasons to celebrate or be happy. The night before the practice round of the Masters that year, you remember sitting in the hotel room watching the Cardinals opening day on TV with my dad as you were about to go to one of the greatest golf tournaments. Two weeks later, you had the opportunity to have another special outing and both oddly, featured long car drives which afforded you the opportunity to talk about everything and anything: from how to make a 6-person golf weekend work to finances and family to work and of course, the Cardinals. You cherish and hold on to every opportunity you had to spend time with him. You now hold on to those memories as an ineffable emotion. And when you can think of him and get past the pain, you see his face, one that gave you comfort and wisdom, and that took joy from the world around him.

And this year, I must add memories of my own as well. I am still in my year of mourning for my dear Mum and will speak about her probably this time next year. But I also said a final goodbye to my Uncle David – the upstart boy from Newcastle who swept my Dad's big sister off her feet. He came to California in 1961 to make something of himself – and he did. Four children and nine grandchildren later, he became my American Dad when I crossed the ocean, alternately holding my hand and spurring me on, always larger than life. I shall miss his quick and accurate reads of difficult situations, his outrageousness and his unabashed capacity for enjoyment – the last thing he did was to have lunch in Malibu, the first place he went to on his arrival in California many years before. David ben Yitzhak u'Frumme, I carry you with me.

And as I do so, and as I look around the room at all of us who are still on this journey of grief, and still others who are on similar journeys, I take consolation from the way the Torah talks about the crossing of that sea. It's true that we never find out how long it took or felt. But not once, not twice, not even three times, but that magical Pesah number four is the number of times the Torah takes care to tell us that the people passed through *on dry land*. Grief may feel infinite, but it still has a solid foundation. Our memories are the very pathway that will lead us through. And, like the Children of Israel, one day we will look back, and remember, and realize that we did make a crossing after all.

The Yizkor service can be found in the booklet.