

Good afternoon L'shanna tova. Yizkor is our Memorial Service.

For those new to the Yizkor service, the service is generally a collection of readings and recitations revolving around two forms of prayer: in one, each of us offering individual prayers, in which we appeal for God's continued protection for the souls of our loved ones and the other, the El Malei Raḥamim, the traditional memorial prayer that expresses the hope that the dead rest in peace under God's divine protection.

In preparation of the Yizkor service, it is customary to list the names of members of family and the community to be remembered in a book. Thanks to Amy Cooper and her team, we have a beautiful 1st edition 2025 Kol Rina Yizkor book. It also is customary to light a memorial candle in memory of those remembered during Yizkor, These acts of goodwill are believed to bring merit to the souls of the departed.

The origin of Yizkor suggests that it possibly was composed in reaction to the Crusades and the terrible loss of Jewish life in that horrible period of history.

Originally, Yizkor was recited only on Yom Kippur. Its primary purpose was to honor the deceased by committing to give *tzedakah* [charity] in their memory, on the theory that the good deeds of the survivors elevate the souls of the departed. It also enhanced the chances for personal atonement by doing a deed of lovingkindness. Since the Torah reading on the last day of the pilgrimage festivals [the holidays of Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot] mentions the importance of donations, Yizkor was added to these holiday services as well.

The word Yizkor translates to "may God remember", but what I remember as a kid growing up was that at this point in the service, there was a significant pause. The sanctuary doors were opened, and there was a great influx of adults and older people making their way to their seats, many of whom we hadn't seen all year, making this, the number one attraction of the high holidays

At the same time the elders were finding their way, there was an exodus of children and young people leaving the sanctuary, creating quite a traffic jam. There is no law or commandment that people who have not sustained the loss of a parent or a loved one should not attend Yizkor, but rather a custom, a tradition, or more accurately a superstition that somehow attending the service might tempt fate to be detrimental to parents or loved ones. Another justification is that those who have suffered terrible losses in their lives deserve some privacy as they mourn publicly.

To me as a youngster, the choice of staying in services already having been there for several long hours versus going outside in the fresh air, taking a walk or just sitting in the sun on a beautiful fall day was clear. No sooner than my father turned to me and nodded and pointed to the exit, that I was gone in a flash. As a result I was 33 years old before I attended my first Yizkor service following the death of my first wife.

This short but poignant service seeks to remember and honor departed loved ones to whom we owe so much as well as Jewish martyrs of every age who perished for upholding the Jewish faith, to remember them all on the very same day that we seek redemption.

Unlike other times of communal remembrance, Yizkor is for specific memories of relatives and friends, each of us personally But how to do this?

Here I must thank Treasure Cohen for not only drafting me for this assignment but for also loaning me one of her books focused on Yom Kippur Readings.

Yizkor - Bob Woog

I have been remembering the same way each and every year of the past 46 years although I was unsure if my way was proper, so being insecure, I have never mentioned it to anyone.

In Treasure's book, there is a Yizkor sermon by Rabbi David Woznica Here I will paraphrase. Rabbi Woznica begins by observing that Yizkor is brief and following a few silent prayers, we are left with moments of silence. He chooses to use those moments to perform an exercise to take a journey into the hearts of our loved ones.

Begin by closing your eyes and imagining walking into a very familiar room and shutting the door and then envisioning your beloved one is there. Look into their eyes, touch their hands and feel their skin.

Listen to their voices. Then speak to your loved one sharing whatever news or feelings you have. Then you will have transformed an ordinary moments into a sacred moment.

Rabbi Woznica then recounts that a man who lost his mother that year told him that he would give anything just to have a few moments with her. Rabbi Woznica replied Yizkor provides those moments.

What a relief I felt after reading this For 46 years I have had the exact same remembrance during Yizkor. I close my eyes and after paying respect to my parents, I play the same video clip in my head, the same crystal clear memory every year. My dearly departed wife and I are at Friday night services at Temple Emeth in Teaneck NJ. I'm on the aisle and she is next to me. We rise for the Alenu and I reach out my right hand and take her soft hand in mine. I feel her closeness. We turn to each other. I admire her, look deep into her eyes, she smiles and softly says my name and we are united again.

This is my Yizkor Moment

May you all recall very pleasant memories and I wish you find your way to your Yizkor moment.
L'shanna tova.