

# May Memory Be A Blessing



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## Introduction

Remembering and forgetting are elemental, living materials of the world like sea and dry land, says the poet, Yehuda Amichai. Like water and earth, remembering and forgetting each has a place in the ecology of living, although memory is privileged over forgetting. *May memory be a blessing*, we say. We say no such thing about forgetting although we are reminded time and again by poets and sages that forgetting can also be a blessing.

The statement, *May memory be a blessing*, might be a hope, prayer, invitation, or challenge. The phrase usually follows only by a breath (or by a comma) the name of the departed: “So-and-So, may her memory be a blessing.” It is as though that phrase becomes our collective family name, says Amichai; making us kin and company in a common effort to make memory a blessing.

Remembering and keeping go hand in hand. An ancient teacher opined that Jacob remembered Joseph’s dreams by picking up a reed pen and noting the moment. *Remember the Sabbath* (Exodus 20:8) and *keep the Sabbath* (Deuteronomy 5:12) Ancient sages taught that these two commands were spoken by God in the same utterance. Both conspire to preserve the Sabbath beyond historical or scientific memory. The Sabbath Kiddush begins the day by invoking and evoking memories of the world’s creation and of the exodus from Egypt—memories carry truth, regardless of whether they carry fact.

The Hasidic master, *Sefat Emet*, reminds us that through the Sabbath we remember our way to the past, and to the future.

Memory is always changing, says Amichai. Pristine, unchanged memory, is only to be found sealed and preserved within the amber of forgetting. A memory forgotten is eternally at rest; memory renewed can redeem us from one Egypt and the next. Such memory is a source of blessing and a resource for ongoing creative living. Everyone's capacity for memory—whether whole like the second tablets from Sinai or fragmented like the first set—is a treasure to be carried in the Ark throughout the journey.

We are commanded: *You shall remember **all** of the journey...* (Deuteronomy 8:2). Said the *Sefat Emet*, remembering **all** of the journey means remembering more than the map which reveals only measurable distance. We have the capacity to remember the immeasurable journey in space, time, and soul—categories of spiritual existence for the *Sefat Emet* that are beyond measure. In these worlds, memory tells us that there is more truth in the journey than has ever been found. The memory that fills and overflows in this way is a blessing.

Through the story of the binding of Isaac, Amichai reflects that when someone forgets details of the journey we fill in the story as we remember it; creating new memory. Perhaps father Isaac had already forgotten some of his harrowing journey to the altar of his intended sacrifice. But his children remember, restore, and reassemble the story for him—and even more so, for themselves.

A verse from Proverbs teaches that *the memory of the righteous is a blessing* (Proverbs 10:7). But from the time of the Bible onward, Jewish discourse has never insisted on the qualifier, *righteous*. *Zichrono/ah liv'racha, may his/her memory be a blessing*, is enough. That which is remembered for the good testifies on behalf of someone's most upright qualities that can become a blessing for those who remember.

According to the Talmud and its commentators, the impulse to make memory a blessing must surely predate King Solomon and his Book of Proverbs. Indeed, they tell us, making memory a blessing was behind God's remarkable thinking-out-loud moment that we overhear regarding the fate of Sodom: *Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do... since all the nations of the world are to be blessed through him* (Genesis 18:17-18)? Abraham's memory must be a blessing, an exemplary model of behavior for future generations.

The name, Abraham, still carries blessing. The *Sefat Emet* teaches that the memory of a name celebrates the past even as the story of that name, remembered for a blessing, contributes to the future. Living up to—and into—a name inherited makes a life into a blessing enacted and extended.

Says the midrash, when someone dies, memory bridges from this world to the next. When the student teaches the teacher's Torah, the lips of that departed move in the grave, reciting the shared Torah. Living words in two living worlds make memory a blessing.

Amichai never wants us to forget the blessing of that can come from forgetting. In Israel especially, says the poet, memory can be a paralyzing and constraining burden from which one cannot escape. Perhaps the vast institutional reminders of mountains, gardens, synagogues, streets, and more, can shoulder the burden of remembering for a while, so that the poet can rest.

The paradox of remembering and forgetting appears yet again in Amichai's poetry. Sometimes memory is a blessing; sometimes it is a blessing to forget. Pristine memory can only be preserved within forgetting, the only environment within which an absolute memory is safe from change. Although, if it cannot be accessed, is the "memory" a memory, after all? The paradox upon which the poet insists appears in ancient rabbinic law: There is one commandment that can only be fulfilled by forgetting.

For two generations, says Amichai, forgetting is part of the organic material of active remembering. Forgetting shapes and prunes the tree of a life. But the third generation—critically distant from the life shaping experiences of forebears—must schematize, ritualize, and reconstruct memory, and maintain it with rigor and consistency.

When someone dies, says Amichai, the dam of a life has broken and a person's past breaks through into the future. Evidence of a life—possessions, records, documents, stories from all angles—burst through with critical power that carries mourners forward in complicated, uncontrollable, emotional, and powerful ways. The process of mourning is to make that life "one" and coherent within the lives of those who remember so that the memory—*zecher*—of the dam—*secher*—will be a blessing.

Although forgetting is part of the world's necessary living material, we still derive comfort in the claim that somewhere those forgotten things still reside. Perhaps we will one day recover them from a found photo or through a chain of stories, in the face of another, in a certain smell, melody, or sensation. Our central memorial prayer begins, "May God Remember..." God remembers all forgotten things, says one New Year prayer.

Finally, comes the voice of the Talmudic epilogue to learning, recited when we take our leave of a tractate or a theme studied thoroughly. We animate the beloved learning, declaring our commitment to remembering the text within life's context. We hope to be remembered by the text as well; our life experiences illuminate the pages of the text, even as the text helps to make sense of our lives. We pray that we will never forget our learning, nor be forgotten by it; neither in this world, nor in the world to come.

*Rabbi Steven G. Sager*  
*Director of Sicha*

## The World Is Full Of Remembering And Forgetting

העולם מלא זכירה ושכחה  
 כמו ים ויבשה. לפעמים הזכרון  
 הוא היבשה המוצקת והקימת  
 ולפעמים הזכרון הוא הים שמכסה הכל  
 כמו במבול והשכחה היא היבשה מצילה כמו אררט.

The world is full of remembering and forgetting  
 as with sea and dry land. Sometimes memory  
 is the dry land, firm and founded  
 and sometimes memory is the sea that covers everything  
 like the flood and forgetting is the saving dry ground like Arrarat.

Yeduda Amichai/Sager



## One and Only One Door

הַדֶּלֶת הָאַחַת וְהַיְחִידָה

הִיא יֵצֵאָה בַּדֶּלֶת הָאַחַת וְהַיְחִידָה  
שֶׁדִּרְכָּהּ יּוֹצְאִים כָּל הַמֵּתִים מִן הָעוֹלָם.  
זוֹ אוֹתָהּ הַדֶּלֶת הָאַחַת וְהַיְחִידָה  
שֶׁדִּרְכָּהּ נִכְנָסִים לָעוֹלָם.

וְשֵׁם מְשַׁפְּחָתָהּ הַחֲדָשׁ  
כְּמוֹ שֶׁל כָּלֵם :  
זְכוּרָנָהּ לְבִרְכָּהּ.

שְׁמָהּ הַמָּלֵא מֵעַכְשָׁו וְעַד לְתַחִית הַמֵּתִים :  
פְּרִידָה זְכוּרָנָהּ לְבִרְכָּהּ.

She left through the one and only door  
by which all the dead leave the world.  
The same one and only door  
by which we enter the world.

And her new family name  
like everyone else:  
mayhermemorybeablessing

Her full name from now until the resurrection of the dead:  
Frieda mayhermemorybeablessing.

Yeduda Amichai/Sager



## Keep And Remember

וְיִקְנְאוּבוֹ אֶחָיו וְאָבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת־הַדָּבָר.

*Now his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter. (Genesis 37:11)*

...וְאָבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת־הַדָּבָר - אָמַר רַבִּי לֵוִי: נָטַל קוֹלָמוֹס וְכָתַב בְּאֵיזָה יוֹם וּבְאֵיזָה שָׁעָה וּבְאֵיזָה מָקוֹם.

*...but his father kept the matter - Said Rabbi Levi: He [Jacob] took up a quill and noted the day, the hour, and the place. (Genesis Rabbah 84:12)*



זָכוֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ.

*Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it. (Exodus 20:8)*

שָׁמֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ

*Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it. (Deuteronomy 5:12)*

שָׁמֹר - וּבְרָאשׁוֹנוֹת הוּא אוֹמֵר זָכוֹר. שְׁנֵיהֶם בְּדָבָר אֶחָד וּבְתִיבָה אַחַת נֶאֱמָרוּ.

*Keep—whereas in the earlier commandments of Exodus 20 it says, remember. Both were spoken in one utterance and with one word. (Rashi on Deuteronomy 5:12)*

שָׁמֹר וְזָכוֹר בְּדָבָר אֶחָד *Keep and remember in one divine word*

הַשְּׁמִיעָנוּ אֵל הַמְּיֻחָד. *So was the one God's command clearly heard*

L'cha Dodi, Shlomo HaLevi Alkabetz

## Kiddush for Erev Shabbat קדוש לערב שבת

וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר  
 יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי. וַיֵּכְלוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל צִבְאָם. וַיֵּכֶל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי  
 מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה. וַיִּשְׁבּוּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה. וַיְבָרֶךְ  
 אֱלֹהִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ, כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מִכָּל מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא  
 אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת.

[In a whisper:] And there was evening and morning

The sixth day. The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array. On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done. (Genesis 1:31-2:3)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'	Baruch/Overflowing are you, Adonai,
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם	our God, Sovereign of the world
בוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן.	creator of the fruit of the vine.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'	Baruch/Overflowing are you, Adonai,
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם	our God, Sovereign of the world
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו	who singled us out with commandments
וְרָצָה בָּנוּ	favored us
וְשַׁבַּת קִדְּשׁוֹ	and his holy Shabbat
בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן	with love and favor
הִנְחִילָנוּ	endowed us
זִכְרוֹן לְמַעֲשֵׂה בְּרָאשִׁית.	a reminder of the acts of creation.
כִּי הוּא יוֹם תְּחִילָה	For this day preeminent among
לְמִקְרָאֵי קוֹדֶשׁ	holy seasons
זִכָּר לִיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם.	commemorates going forth from Egypt.
כִּי בָנוּ בְּחִרָתָ	You have chosen us
וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָ	and singled us out
מִכָּל הָעַמִּים!	among all peoples!
וְשַׁבַּת קִדְּשָׁךְ	Your holy Shabbat
בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן	in love and favor
הִנְחַלְתָּנוּ.	you have bequeathed to us.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'	Baruch/Overflowing are you, Adonai,
מִקְדֵּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת.	who makes Shabbat holy.

## A Reminder Of Creation And Of Freedom

The people of Israel said: “Show us an example of the World To Come so that we will understand, as children of this world, how to live there.” God responded to this request by giving Israel the Shabbat—a taste of the World To Come within this world. For that reason, we say that Shabbat is a *zikaron l'ma-asei v'reisheet*, a reminder of the works of creation. At first blush, we are surprised: Why do the works of creation require a reminder? After all, we see the works of creation in the world's daily existence! Of what must we be reminded? The explanation is that in the future, in the World To Come, Shabbat will be the only reminder of the work week.

Now, every Shabbat, we move from this world to live in that World To Come reality. We forget the work-a-day world and join ourselves to that which flows from the World To Come; a flow and takes the shape of a this-worldly day. *Remember the Sabbath day* is a remembering so deep that it is impossible to forget; a remembering that goes back to creation and also forward to the World To Come. It is a remembering that is remembered by forgetting the week that has passed. And it is a remembering not to be forgotten in the week to come. Rather, it is a remembering towards the future, towards the next taste of the World To Come. Anticipated and remembered, Shabbat draws us, even as it is drawn from the World To Come. *Zikaron l'ma-asei v'reisheet*, a reminder of the works of creation—Such a remembering that is also a forgetting can be nothing other than the World To Come.

The extent to which we can remember Shabbat during the week of creating, is the measure of our ability to forget the week of creating during Shabbat. And that ability to free ourselves for the Shabbat taste of the World To Come is also a *zecher li-yetiziat Mitzrayim*, a recollection of going forth from Egypt. (Sefat Emet on Exodus chapter 20, from January 1896 and 1897. Interpretive translations by Rabbi Steven Sager)

## Who Will Remember? By What Means Do We Keep?

ומי יזכר? ובמה משמרים זכרון? במה משמרים בכלל בעולם,  
משמרים במלח ובסכר, בחם גבה ובקפאה עמקה  
באטימה מחלטה, ביבוש ובחניטה.  
אבל שמור הזכרון הטוב ביותר הוא  
לשמרו בתוך השכחה שאף זכירה אחת  
לא תוכל לעולם לחזור לתוכה ולהפריע את מנוחת הנצח של הזכרון.

And who will remember? And by what means do we keep memory? How do we preserve anything in the world?

We preserve with salt and sugar, high heat and deep freeze

With vacuum seal, with drying and embalming.

But the best way of preserving memory is

To protect it within forgetting so that even a single recollection

Will be unable to penetrate and disturb the eternal rest of the memory.

Yeduda Amichai/Sager

## Assembling Fragments of Memory And Meaning

And the final redemption will be when all the hidden meanings of going forth from Egypt are clarified and understood; for the redemption of that day will include all other days of redemptions. This is what is written: *In order that you remember the day of your going out of Egypt all the days of your life...All the days of your life include the days of the Messiah* (Mishnah Berachot 1:5). For remembering and recounting the Exodus brings the days of the Messiah.

At the time of going forth from Egypt God had hoped for there to be complete mending and unifying of the world—right then—as it would be in the future when, *the Lord and His name are one*. But the wicked Amalek frustrated Israel as it is written: *Amalek happened upon you along the way* [to what should have been a different end] (Deuteronomy 25:18). And, therefore, we must remember his hatred forever. Indeed, he forced upon us all the exiles. And now, we remember and tell the story of going forth from Egypt year after to arouse mending and unifying. And Amalek's name is blotted out bit by bit. That is why we refer to the act of this night as *Seder* for we must return and reorder the story of the going forth from Egypt so that it can be mended and ordered and thereby bring about the redemption, quickly and in our day. Amen!

Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (*Sefat Emet*), April 1875



## Carrying Whole Tablets And Fragments

תני רבי יהודה בר אלעאי : שני ארונות היו מהלכין עם ישראל במדבר - אחד שהיתה התורה נתונה בתוכו ואחד שהיו שבגרי לוחות נתונים בתוכו. זה שהיתה התורה נתונה בתוכו היה מנח באהל מועד, וזה שהיו שבגרי לוחות נתונים בתוכו היה נכנס ויוצא עמקם.

Rabbi Yehudah bar Ilai taught: Two arks accompanied Israel in the wilderness- one contained the Torah, and in the other were the fragments of the tablets. The one that contained the Torah was kept in the Tent of Meeting; and the other that contained the fragments of the tablets would accompany them into battle. (Jerusalem Talmud, Shekalim 1:1)

כדאמר להו רבי יהושע בן לוי לבניה... והזהירו בזקן ששכח תלמודו מחמת אונסו דאמרין : לוחות ושבגרי לוחות מונחות בארון.

Said Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi to his children... Be careful when it comes to an elder who has forgotten his learning because of his misfortune, for it is said: The tablets as well as the fragments of the tablets were placed into the Ark. (Berachot 8b)

## Remember All Of The Journey

אֵלֶּה מִסְעֵי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָצְאוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם (במדבר לג:א) ... בענין המסעות שנכתבו בתורה וכתוב אֲשֶׁר יָצְאוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. כי הנה הליכות בני ישראל באלה המסעות היינו שלא בדרך הטבע ונכתב לזכור נפלאות השי"ת כמ"ש: וְזָכַרְתָּ אֶת־כָּל־הִדְרֹךְ אֲשֶׁר הוֹלִיכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ זֶה אֲרֻבַּעִים שָׁנָה בַּמִּדְבָּר (דברים ח:ב). והוא גם כן לזכור זכות בני"י כמ"ש: הֲלֹךְ וְקִרְאתָ בְּאֲזִינֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם לֵאמֹר כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה זָכַרְתִּי לְךָ תַּסֵּד נְעוּרֶיךָ אֶהְבֵּת כְּלוּלְתֶּיךָ לְכַתֵּךְ אַחֲרֵי בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה (ירמיה ב:ב). ובאמת אין מבא ללכת באלה המקומות רק בני"י אשר יצאו מא"מ ונתעלו מדרך הטבע כמ"ש: וְלֹא אָמְרוּ אֵינָהּ יְהוָה הַמַּעֲלָה אֶתָּנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הַמּוֹלִיךָ אֶתָּנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּאֶרֶץ עֲרָבָה וְשׁוּחָה בְּאֶרֶץ צִיָּה וְצִלְמוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא־עֶבֶר בְּהָ אִישׁ וְלֹא־יֵשֵׁב אָדָם שָׁם (ירמיה ב:ו). והשי"ת כשברא העולם הניח מקומות אשר אין הישוב שם בדרך הטבע. וכמו כן עשה הקב"ה בזמן שיש זמנים שאין ההנהגה בדרך הטבע. וכמו כן בנפשות שיש נפשות שאין הנהגתם בדרך הטבע. ועל זה הוא עדות על השי"ת. והדברים שיצאו מן הכלל הם להעיד על הכלל כולו. לכן, שבת סהדותא אקרי (זוהר יתרו צ:א) שהנהגה בשבתות לא בדרך הטבע. וכמו שיש מ"ח שבתות בשנה כמו כן מ"ח מסעות בעולם שאינו דרך הטבע.

Regarding the journeys written in the Torah it says specifically, *who went out from the land of Egypt* (Numbers 33:1)). For these travels of the people of Israel to those places were not according to the rules of nature and it is written specifically in order to remember the wonders of the Blessed Holy One, as it is written: *You shall remember all of the journey...* (Deuteronomy 8:2). And this is also for the sake of remembering the merit of Israel, as it is written: *I remember to your benefit the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride; how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown* (Jeremiah 2:2). And, in truth, there is no way of entering those places except for the people of Israel who left Egypt and were lifted above nature's ways, as it is written: *They never asked themselves, "Where is the Lord who lifted us above the land of Egypt; who led us through the wilderness, a land of deserts and pits; a land of drought and darkness, a land that no one has traversed and where no human being has dwelt* (Jeremiah 2:6)?" The Blessed Holy One, when He created the **world**, left certain places that would not be inhabited according to the ways of nature. Just so, the Blessed Holy One made **time** punctuated with times that would be beyond nature. Likewise, in the realm of **souls** that there are souls whose conduct would be beyond nature. And all of this as a testimony to the Blessed Holy One. And those exceptions to the rule are testimony to the rule. Just so, according to the Zohar: *Shabbat is called "Witness"* (Zohar, Yitro 90a). For Shabbat conduct is not limited to the ways of nature. And as there are forty-eight Shabbatot in the year, so are there forty-eight journeys in the world that are not constrained by nature. (Sefat Emet, Parashat Masa'ei 1889)

## The Things He Had Perhaps Already Forgotten

אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ לֹקַח כָּל שָׁנָה אֶת בָּנָיו לְהַר הַמֹּרִיָּה  
 כְּשֶׁם שֶׁאֲנִי לֹקַח אֶת יְלָדֵי לְגִבְעוֹת הַנֶּגֶב שֶׁבָּהֶן הִיָּתָה לִי מִלְחָמָה.  
 אַבְרָהָם מְטִיל עִם בָּנָיו : כָּאֵן הַשְּׂאֲרָתִי אֶת הָעֶבְדִּים  
 שֶׁם קִשְׁרָתִי אֶת הַחֲמֹר לַעֲץ לְרִגְלֵי הָהָר,  
 וּפֹה, מִמָּשׁ פֹּה, שְׂאֵלָתְּ יִצְחָק בְּנִי, הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ וְהָעֵצִים  
 וְאֵיךְ הַשָּׂה לַעֲוֹלָה. וְקִצַּת לְמַעַלָּה מִזֶּה שְׂאֵלָתְּ בַּפֶּעַם הַשְּׁנִיָּה.  
 וְכִשְׁהִגִּיעוּ לְמָרוֹם הָהָר נָחוּ מֵעַט וְאָכְלוּ  
 וְשָׁתוּ וְהִרְאָה לָהֶם אֶת הַסִּבָּךְ שֶׁבּוֹ נֶאֱחָז הָאֵיל בְּקֶרְנָיו.  
 וְכִשְׂאֲבָרָהֶם מִתְּלַחֵק יִצְחָק אֶת בָּנָיו לְאוֹתוֹ הַמָּקוֹם.  
 "פֹּה הִרְמַתִּי אֶת הָעֵצִים וְשֶׁם הִתְנַשְּׁפָתִי,  
 פֹּה שְׂאֵלָתִי וְאָבִי עָנָה לִי, אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה לּוֹ  
 הַשָּׂה לַעֲוֹלָה, וְשֶׁם כָּבֵר יִדְעָתִי שְׂזָה אֲנִי."  
 וְכִשְׂיִצְחָק הִתְעוֹרַר יְלָדָיו הוֹבִילוּ אוֹתוֹ לְאוֹתוֹ  
 הָהָר הַמֹּרִיָּה וְתֹארוּ לוֹ בְּמַלְּוִים  
 אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה שְׂאוּלֵי כָּבֵר שִׁכַּח.

Abraham, our father, takes his sons every year to Mount Moriah  
 just like I take my children to the hills of the Negev where I fought my war.  
 Abraham hikes with his sons: Here is where I left the servants  
 there I tied up the donkey to a tree at the base of the mountain,  
 and here, right here, you, Isaac my son, asked here is the fire and the wood  
 but where is the lamb for the offering. And a bit farther up from here you asked a second time.  
 And when they got to the top of the mountain they rested a bit and ate  
 and drank and he showed them the thicket in which the ram was caught by his horns.  
 And when Abraham died, Isaac took his sons to the same place.  
 "Here I picked up the wood and there I stopped for a breath,  
 here I asked and my father answered me, God will provide himself  
 a lamb for the offering, and there I already knew that it was me."  
 And when Isaac grew blind his children brought him to the very same  
 Mount Moriah and described for him in words  
 all of those things that he had perhaps already forgotten.

Yehuda Amichai/Sager

## Deepest Memory of Memory As A Blessing

אמר ליה רבינא לההוא מרבנן דהוה מסדר אגדתא קמיה : מנא הא מילתא דאמור רבנן "זכר צדיק לברכה"? אמר ליה : דהא פתיב "זכר צדיק לברכה" (משלי י: ז). מדאורייתא מנא לן? דכתיב : "המכסה אני מאברהם אשר אני עושה?". וכתב, "ואברהם היו יהיה לגוי גדול ועצום (בראשית יח: יז-יח)".

Said Ravina to the sage who was a librarian of ancient oral teachings for him: What is the source of this phrase that the sages employ, "May the memory of the righteous be a blessing"? The sage replied: That is a biblical verse [from the Writings, the last third of the Bible]: *May the memory of the righteous be a blessing* (Proverbs 10:7). But what is its source in the Torah, [asked Ravina]? It is [implicit in] the verse: *Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am about to do?* Which is followed by the verse: *Since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the world are to bless themselves through him* (Genesis 18:18)

Yoma 38b



וה' אמר המכסה אני מאברהם אשר אני עושה? ואברהם היו יהיה לגוי גדול ועצום ונברכו בו כל גויי הארץ (בראשית יח: יז-יח). מדרש אגדה: "זכר צדיק לברכה" (משלי י: ז). הואיל והזכירו ברכו. ופשוטו של מקרא: וכי ממנו אני מעלים, והלא חביב לפני להיות לגוי עצום, לשון רש"י. והנכון, כי השם יתברך דבר בכבוד אברהם. אמר: הנה הוא עתיד להיות לגוי גדול ועצום, ויהיה זכרו בזרעו ובכל גויי הארץ לברכה; לכן לא אכסה ממנו כי יאמרו הדורות הבאים: איך כסה ממנו, או איך נתאכזר הצדיק על שכניו החונים עליו, ולא רחם ולא התפלל עליהם כלל.

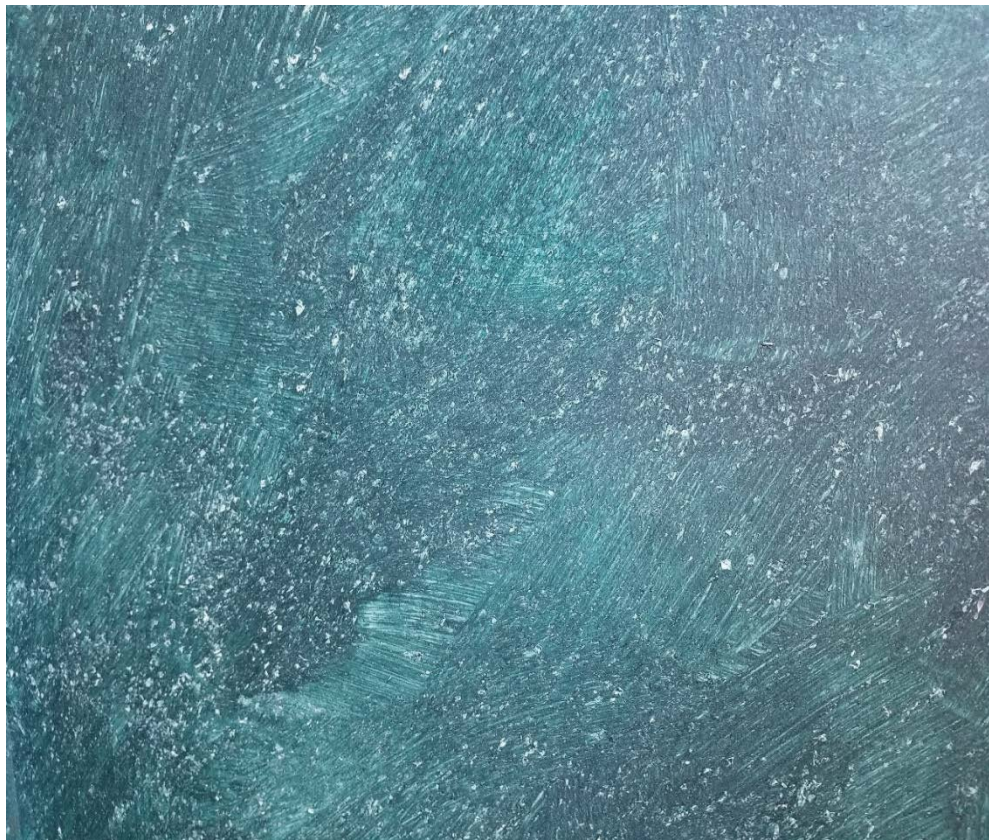
*The Lord said: Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am about to do? Since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the world are to bless themselves through him* (Genesis 18:17-18). According to midrash: *The memory of the righteous is a blessing* (Proverbs 10:7), and in the very mentioning of Abraham's name, God blessed him. But the most straightforward understanding of the verse is: Shall I hide this from him, seeing as how he is so beloved by me as to become a great nation? This is the language of Rashi. But the correct understanding is that the blessed holy one spoke with concern for Abraham's honor; saying: Behold, he is destined to be a mighty and great nation and the memory of him will serve as a blessing to his descendants and to all the nations of the earth; therefore, I will not hide it from him lest future generations say: Is it possible that either God hid [this destruction] from him or that a person as righteous as Abraham showed such cruelty to his neighbors and neither pitied them nor prayed for them? (Ramban on Genesis 18:18)

## Blessings Remembered In The Stars And In The Selves

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרִימָה כֹּי מִנָּאם בְּחַיֵּיהֶם וּבְמִיתָתָן לְהוֹדִיעַ חֵיבָתָן שֶׁנִּמְשְׁלוּ כְּכּוֹכָבִים ... וְהֵנָּה הַשְּׁבִטִים הֵם תִּיקְנוּ לַעֲצָמָם וּלְדוֹרוֹת. וְלִכֵּן נִמְנוּ בְּמִיתָתָן לְהוֹדִיעַ כִּי הִשְׁאִירוּ בְּרָכָה. וּשְׁמוֹתֵיהֶם מִתְקַנִּים וּמֵאִירִים לְכָל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ... וְעֲלֵיהֶם נֹאמַר 'זֵכֶר צַדִּיק לְבְרָכָה' ... וְהַצַּדִּיקִים נִשְׁאָר מֵהֶם בְּרָכָה לְדוֹרוֹת ... וְעַדִּין הֵם מֵאִירִים לְכָל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

*These are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt (Exodus 1: 1) Named in their lives when they came to Egypt with Jacob, and now in their deaths as their descendants leave Egypt bearing the same names; so precious that they are likened to stars. Look! The tribes are a model for themselves and for subsequent generations. And therefore, they are counted in their deaths to make known that their blessing remains. And their names form and enlighten all the people of Israel... and regarding them it is said, *may the memory of the righteous be a blessing*... and the righteous remain as a blessing for all generations... still shining and illuminating all of Israel.*

Sefat Emet (Parashat Shemot) 1896



## Memory And Blessing In Two Worlds

מאי דכתב "אגורה באהלך עולמים" (תהילים סא:ה)? וכי אפשר לו לאדם לגור בשני עולמים? אלא אמר דוד לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבונו של עולם, יהי רצון שיאמרו דבר שמועה מפי בעולם הזה. דאמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחי: כל תלמיד חכם שאומרים דבר שמועה מפיו בעולם הזה שפתותיו דובבות בקבר. אמר רבי יצחק בן זעירה ואיתימא שמעון נזירא: מאי קראה? "וחפך כיון הטוב הולך לדודי למישרים דובב שפתי ישנים" (שיר השירים ז:י).

What is the meaning of the verse, *O, that I might dwell in your tent forever/in two worlds* (Psalm 61:5)? It is this- Said David before the blessed Holy One: Master of the world, may it be your will that they say a word of teaching that came from my own mouth in this world. As Rabbi Yohanan said in the name of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai: Every sage whose teaching is quoted in this world, his lips move in the grave. Said Rabbi Yitzhak ben Zeira, and some say it was Shimon Nezira: What is the confirming verse? *Your mouth is like choicest wine. Let it flow to my beloved as new wine gliding over the lips of sleepers* (Song of Songs 7:10).

Yevamot 97a



[ד]אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יהוצדק: כל מי שנאמרה הלכה בשמו בעולם הזה, שפתותיו דובבות בקבר; שנאמר: "דובב שפתי ישנים" (שיר השירים ז:י).

Said Rabbi Yohanan in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yehotzadak: Everyone in whose name halacha/law has been taught in this world, that person's lips move in the grave; as it is said: *Gliding over the lips of sleepers* (Song of Songs 7:10).

Sanhedrin 90b

## Let Mt. Remembrance Remember

שְׁהַר הַזְכָּרוֹן יִזְכֹּר בְּמִקוֹמִי,  
 זֶה תִּפְקֹדוּ. שְׁהֲגֹן לְזִכָּר יִזְכֹּר,  
 שְׁהָרְחוֹב עַל שֵׁם יִזְכֹּר, שְׁהַבִּינֵן הַיְדוּעַ יִזְכֹּר,  
 שְׁבֵית הַתְּפִלָּה עַל שֵׁם אֱלֹהִים יִזְכֹּר,  
 שְׁסֹפֵר הַתּוֹרָה הַמִּתְגַּלְגֵּל יִזְכֹּר,  
 שְׁהִיזְכֹּר יִזְכֹּר. שְׁהַדָּגִלִים יִזְכֹּרוּ,  
 הַתְּכָרִיכִים הַצְּבֻעוֹנִיִּים שֶׁל הַהִיסְטוֹרִיָּה, אֲשֶׁר  
 הַגּוֹפִים שֶׁעֲטָפוּ הִפְכוּ אֶבֶק. שְׁהָאֶבֶק יִזְכֹּר.  
 שְׁהָאֲשָׁפָה תִזְכֹּר בְּשַׁעַר. שְׁהַשְׁלִיָּה תִזְכֹּר.  
 שְׁחַיֵּית הַשָּׂדֶה וְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם יֹאכְלוּ וְיִזְכְּרוּ,  
 שְׁכֻלָם יִזְכְּרוּ. כְּדִי שְׁאוּכַל לָנוּחַ.

Let Mt. Remembrance remember instead of me,  
 that's its role. Let the memorial garden remember,  
 let the street named in memory remember, let the famous building remember,  
 let God's prayer house remember,  
 let the rolling Torah remember,  
 let the prayer for remembering remember. Let the flags remember,  
 colorful shrouds of history, the  
 bodies they wrapped have turned to dust. Let the dust remember.  
 Let the garbage remember in the gate. Let the afterbirth remember.  
 Let the animal of the field and the bird of the sky eat and remember,  
 Let everyone remember. So that I can rest.

Yeduda Amichai/Sager

## The Mitzvah Of Forgetting

מַעֲשֵׂה בְּחִסִּיד אֶחָד שֶׁשָּׂכַח עוֹמֵר בְּתוֹךְ שָׂדֵהוּ וְאָמַר לְבִנוֹ: צֵא וְהִקְרִיב עָלַי פֶּר לְעוֹלָה וּפֶר לְזִבְחֵי הַשְּׁלָמִים. אָמַר לוֹ: אַבָּא! מַה רְאִיתָ לְשַׁמֵּחַ בְּמִצְוָה זוֹ מִכָּל מִצְוֹת שֶׁבְּתוֹרָה? אָמַר לוֹ: כָּל מִצְוֹת שֶׁבְּתוֹרָה נָתַן לָנוּ הַמָּקוֹם לְדַעְתִּינוּ, זוֹ שֶׁלֹּא לְדַעְתִּינוּ. אֲלָא הָרִי הַכָּתוּב אוֹמֵר: "כִּי תִקְצֹר קִצִּירְךָ בַּשָּׂדֶה וְשָׂכַחְתָּ עוֹמֵר בַּשָּׂדֶה לֹא תָשׁוּב לְקַחְתּוֹ לְגֵר לִיתּוֹם וְלֵאלֶמְנָה יִהְיֶה לְמַעַן יִבְרַכְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ" (דְּבָרִים כד: יט).

The story of a pious man who forgot an omer-measure of wheat in his field and said to his son: Go and sacrifice for me a bull as a whole offering and a bull as a well-being offering. His son said: Abba! what's making you celebrate this mitzvah more than any of the mitzvot in the Torah? He replied: All of the other mitzvot in the Torah the Ever-Present One gave to be carried out with specific consciousness; this one without specific consciousness. For Scripture says: *When you reap the harvest of your field and you forget an omer in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow—in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings* (Deuteronomy 24:19). (Tosefta Peah 3.8)

## Two Generations of Forgetting Have Passed

עכְשׁוֹ עָבְרוּ שְׁנֵי דוֹרוֹת שֶׁל שְׂכַחָה  
וְהִגִּיעַ הַדּוֹר הָרֵאשׁוֹן שֶׁל זְכִירָה. אוֹי לָנוּ שֶׁכָּבֵר  
הִגִּעְנוּ לְזְכִירָה כִּי הַזְכָּרוֹנוֹת הֵם קִלְפָּה קִשָּׁה עַל לֵב רִיק.  
עוֹד מַעֲט וּבִשְׂדוֹת וּבְעָרִים יִתְהַלְכוּ בְּנֵי אָדָם  
וּבִידֵיהֶם כָּמוֹ סִפְרֵי מִגְדִּירֵי צִמְחִים שֶׁל אוֹהֲבֵי טֶבַע,  
עֲכָשׁוֹ מִגְדִּירֵי בְּנֵי אָדָם. וַיִּקְרְאוּ זֶה אֶל זֶה,  
הִנֵּה מִצָּאתִי, לֹא טָעִיתִי, הִנֵּה הַסִּימָנִים, הִנֵּה הַצָּבֵעַ הָאֲפִינִי  
שֶׁל עֵינַיִם וְשֶׁעַר, הִנֵּה הַחִיּוֹד הַיְדוּעַ, זֶה רִיחוֹ  
וְזֶה שְׁמוֹ, זֶה יָדִיד וְזֶה יָדִיד שֶׁל יָדִיד, זֹאת אִשָּׁה  
מֵאֵז, וְזֶה דְּמוּי אָבִי וְזֶה דְּמוּי אֲנִי וְדְמוּי אֶתְּ,  
מְתֵי אֶתְּהָ פוֹרַח מְתֵי אֶתְּהָ נוֹבֵל, זֶה הַשֵּׁם  
הַמְדְּעִי, וְזֶה הַשֵּׁם הַמְקַבֵּל בֵּין אוֹהֲבִים וַיְדִידִים,  
וְזֶה שֵׁם בְּלִי אִישׁ וְזֶה אִישׁ שֶׁאֵין לוֹ שֵׁם.  
וְזֶה הָיָה.

Now two generations of forgetting have passed  
and the first generation of remembering has arrived. Woe to us that already  
we have arrived at remembering for memories are the hard shell of an empty heart.  
In a little while people will walk through fields and cities  
with something like nature lovers' plant guides in hand  
now person guides. And they will call to one another,  
here I found it, no mistake, here are the signs, here is the characteristic color  
of the eyes and hair, here is the well-known smile, this is its fragrance,  
and this is its name, this was a friend, friend of a friend, this a woman  
of long ago, this one is the image of my father and this the image of me and of you,  
when you will flower and when you will wilt, this is the scientific  
name, and this is the common name between lovers and friends,  
and this is a name with no person and this is a person with no name.  
And that's how it was.

Yehuda Amichai/Sager

# IMAGINED MEMORY

**An imagined conversation between  
Yehuda Amichai (poet) and Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (historian)**

*Now two generations of forgetting have passed  
and the first generation of remembering has arrived.*

The modern effort to reconstruct the Jewish past begins at a time that witnesses a sharp break in the continuity of Jewish living and hence also an ever-growing decay of Jewish group memory. In this sense, if for no other, history becomes what it had never been before—the faith of fallen Jews. For the first time, history, not a sacred text, becomes the arbiter of Judaism. (Based on “Two Generations of Forgetting...” by Amichai)



*Woe to us that already  
we have arrived at remembering for memories are the hard shell of an empty heart.*

The break with the intimacy of the old existence has indeed occurred, but the deeper return to this intimacy has not taken place. The enthusiasm for religion and the genuineness of the old relationships has vanished, but no new enthusiasm has broken forth, no new set of relationships has been built. (Edouard Gans, 19<sup>th</sup> Jewish historian, in Yerushalmi's, Zakhor, p.86)



*And that's how it was.*

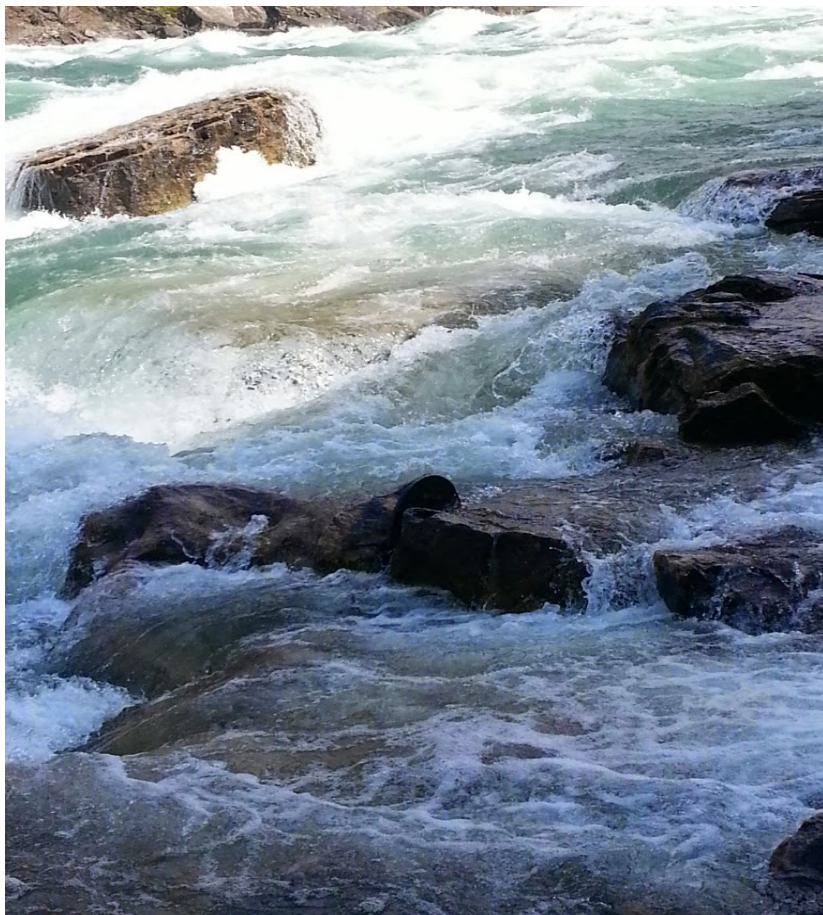
As a professional Jewish historian I am a new creature in Jewish history. My lineage does not extend beyond the second decade of the nineteenth century.... I live within the ironic awareness that the very mode in which I delve into the Jewish past represents a decisive break with that past. (Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Zakhor)

## The Memory Of The Dam Is A Blessing

וְכָל אָדָם הוּא סֶכֶר בֵּין עֵבֶר לְעֵתִיד.  
כְּשֶׁהוּא מֵת נִשְׁבֵּר הַסֶּכֶר וְהָעֵבֶר מִתְפָּרֵץ לְתוֹךְ הָעֵתִיד  
וְאֵין מִקְדָּם וְאֵין מְאַחֵר. וְהַזְמַן הוּא אֶחָד  
כְּמוֹ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, זְמַנּוֹ אֶחָד.  
וְזִכַּר הַסֶּכֶר לְבִרְכָּה.

And every person is a dam between past and future.  
When that one dies the dam is broken and the past breaks through into the future  
and there is no early or late. Time is one  
Like our God, our time is one.  
And the memory of the dam is a blessing.

Yeduda Amichai/Sager



## Yizkor- May God Remember

יזכור אלהים נשמת... שְׁהִלָּךְ לְעוֹלָמוֹ. תְּהִי נִשְׁמָתוֹ צְרוּרָה בְּצִרוּר הַחַיִּים עִם  
אֲבֹרָהִם, יִצְחָק, וְיַעֲקֹב, שָׂרָה, רִבְקָה, רָחֵל, וְלֵאָה, וְעִם שְׂאֵר צַדִּיקִים  
וְצַדִּיקוֹת שְׁבִגוּ עֲדָן. אָמֵן.

May God remember the soul of... who has gone to its eternity. May that soul be bound up in the bond of life with the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, along with all of the other righteous men and women in the Garden of Eden, Amen.



## The Student Takes Leave Of The Text: Let Us Not Forget One Another

הִדְרֹן עֲלֶיךָ	We will return to you
וְהִדְרֹךְ עָלָנוּ	And you will return to us
דְּעִתְנוּ עֲלֶיךָ	Our thoughts are with you
וְדְעִתְךָ עָלָנוּ	And your thoughts are with us
לֹא נִתְנָשִׁי מִנֶּךָ	We will not forget you
וְלֹא תִתְנָשִׁי מִנָּנוּ	Nor will you forget us
לֹא בְעֹלָמָא הַדִּין	Neither in this world
וְלֹא בְעֹלָמָא דְאַתֵּי.	Nor in the world to come.

From the ritual of completing a portion of Talmud