

Memory - The Fabric of Jewish Life

By **Wayne Firestone**

Avraham often teaches, as his father taught him, that there is no such thing as Jewish history, only Jewish memory.

History is a linear progression of evolution and development. Memory, on the other hand, is a much more integrated, comingled notion of pieces of the past mixing with the present. And as we know too well, history is bound to repeat itself unless we remember our past and make it part of who we are.

Avraham emphasizes the ubiquity of remembrance in Judaism – Z'chor, Zecher, Zicharon. He points out that a young couple stands under the chupa full of love and excitement for the life they will make together, yet the first thing they do is break a glass. Why? To remember the destruction of Jerusalem, even at a moment completely focused on the future.

I recently had a similar experience of pausing to remember at a time of great joy. Earlier this year, my daughter Danya became a Bat Mitzvah. As part of this great milestone, I wanted to share with her a piece of my family's story – not a part of our history, but a memory. I grew up hearing stories of my grandparents, Bella and Boris Myrowitz, who were born around 1900 and lived in a village called Popovitch in Ukraine. Their village was very small, and the community lived in constant fear waiting for the Kosaks to attack. Despite that fear, my relatives did not recall a single day where children were kept home from school, or single child who did not know how to read the prayer book or to interpret it into Yiddish.

I haven't forgotten those stories, and was inspired during a recent trip to Kiev and Moscow to search for a remnant from my family's Ukrainian village. I reached out to my Hillel colleagues there, who gave me a blue and white cloth from the Pale of Settlement. Weaving the memories of my grandparents into the future of my family, my wife and I used the cloth to design a tallit that Danya wore on the day of her Bat Mitzvah.

We Jews don't forget our tsuris, our suffering; instead, we wrap our children, our sons and daughters, in a dream coat to build a Jewish life full of hope. We remember, collectively, as a people and as a family. Avraham challenges us, as Jews, to take the collective memory of our people and make it part of our lives.

These memories, and Avraham's teachings, have inspired me to find spirituality and meaning in the journey, in studying, and in teaching others.

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