

Yom Kippur 5774 Yizkor
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On Erev Rosh Hashanah Rabbi Frankel reminded us that Facebook has 1.1 Billion users. If Facebook were a country, it would be the third largest in the world.

In 2007, when I signed up for Facebook, I quickly became obsessed (some would say addicted) with finding "friends." There were friends from college, high school and elementary school. There were rabbinical school friends, family members, and of course many of you.

I now have 1330 Facebook friends. If asked, I could probably tell you my connection to each of them. 1330 lines of connection.

This past summer I found a new obsession: building my family tree. After manually inputting as much as I could to Ancestry.com I decided to splurge. Once I agreed to be billed \$39 a month, the magic of the internet took over. Hints and records instantly started popping up. Marriage certificates, ships' manifests, border crossings, census records, death certificates - some information I knew, a lot that I didn't.

I learned that in my great grandfather's generation, a brother and sister from one family married a brother and sister from another. That meant that my grandfather and my cousin Michael Golden were double first cousins. I learned about my cousin Hy Buller who played defense for the New York Rangers in the early 50s. And while I knew that my sister Naomi and my Zaida Bert both died on June 23rd, just two years apart, I discovered that Tamara's biological grandmother, Bea, also died that day in 1942. We just never knew it.

As I spent more time researching my family tree, I realized that the lines on the screen were more than just lines connecting one relative to the next. Like gossamer threads, these were invisible lines of connection. Each person was somehow connected one to the next, each a different life, each a different story.

In his book, Invisible Lines of Connection, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner speaks about his five rules of the game of life. The first rule is that you cannot decide when to begin playing. The second is that you cannot decide when to stop. The third rule - just to keep you on your toes - is that each player is issued apparently random, undeserved gifts and handicaps throughout the progress of the game. Figuring out why you got the combination package you did transforms all disabilities into gifts, just as refusing to figure out why you were issued what you received, transforms all gifts into disabilities. Rule #4? Points are awarded whenever you can discern the presence, or the signature, of the Creator, and then act so as to help others to see it too.

And the last rule is that everything is connected to everything else. Most of the time we are oblivious to it. We go about our lives as if every event were an accident. But the truth is, all creation is one great unity. Just beneath the surface, joining each person to every other person and to every other thing, are invisible lines of connection. Those are Kushner's rules.

I would add a sixth. Those invisible lines also connect the living to the dead. We know our relatives are still there. They may have left this world recently or may have said farewell years or decades ago but we still sense their presence - when we hear a special song, when we smell their perfume, when their absence is felt at a family simcha, when a seat is empty at the

seder table. They might be physically absent yet we know, because we feel those lines of connection, that they are still there. Maybe that's what kaddish is for.

Our old prayer book, Gates of Prayer had this reading that always spoke to me, "The origins of the Kaddish are mysterious; angels are said to have brought it down from heaven... It possesses wonderful power. Truly if there is any bond strong enough to chain heaven to earth, it is this prayer. It keeps the living together, and forms a bridge to the mysterious realm of the dead." The Kaddish allows us to glimpse, if only for a moment, those invisible lines, because the truth is, those who were alive, are still very much with us.

A few weeks ago I met a man whose wife had died after 61 years of marriage. "It's so hard," he said. I just want to speak with her one more time. I just want to tell her again that I love her." "Tell her," I said. "I believe she will hear you."

People often come to me grieving. "There was so much I wanted to say. There was so much left unsaid. What can I do with these feelings?"

"Talk to them," I say. "It's like prayer. You might not get a response but sometimes a monologue is fine."

"Or write a letter. Write down all the things you wanted to say but didn't. Write down everything you miss about this person. Tell them what you've been up to, what your kids have been doing. Tell them about your successes, your challenges, your frustrations, your disappointments. Writing a letter is a beautiful way to create another line of connection."

Yizkor is our opportunity to connect. Here, as the sun begins to set, as the gates begin to close, we perhaps feel the pull of those invisible lines all the stronger. Right now, we want to give you the opportunity to plug in to one of them. When you entered this sanctuary you received a memory book and a pencil. On p. 29 is a blank line with the words, "personal reflections" across the top. We invite you to spend a few moments, to write a letter to your loved one and then, to take this memory book home.

Of course, whether you actually write words on that page is up to you. Sometimes what we have to say is challenging to communicate. Maybe what comes out are phrases, individual words, even drawings. And know this, even though it's Yom Kippur, you're not breaking any rules. God will understand.

This time of memory when we re-member, when we pull together the pieces of our lives and see ourselves in a chain of tradition, is your time. This is your time to honor a tangible line of connection that you know is there, that you know is real, even if you can't see or touch it. You know it is real because it is a line... made from love.