

I know it is a little late in the game to ask this, but, how many of you did not turn off your cell phones when we began today? I am going to ask you all to do something. On or off, please take out your cell phones. Humor me ... its Yom Kippur. If they are off ... leave them off. If they are on, pretend they are off. Point the camera lens at yourself and pretend to take a selfie. I say pretend, because while you are doing this under rabbinic supervision, I don't want anyone to worry about what hackers might do with a picture of you actually sitting in the pews of a synagogue sanctuary.

Seriously, though, pretend to take a selfie. Pretend, then, that you are posting it to your Facebook, LinkedIn, snap chat, or whatever the social media de jour program you might be using. Pretend that you would have to post it, without looking at it to make sure that you liked the picture? That picture is your legacy.

At some point in time, someone will look at that picture and have immediate thoughts about you. If they know you, those thoughts will encompass all of the experiences in which you shared company. If it is that person's first glimpse of you, then the story might be told very differently.

(PAUSE --- PUTH THEM AWAY)

Yom Kippur demands that we spend time thinking about our legacy. What do we want people to see when they see us? No one would feel comfortable posting an uninspected photo of themselves for the whole world to see. In this day and age, when we don't use film anymore, we are never "stuck" with a bad photo. We may never get the photo we like, but if we do not like one, we hit the "delete" button and it is as if it never happened. The real world, however, does not work that way. We are stuck

with the “photos” that we post. As we walk through this world, people do make long-term judgments about us, even if the only thing that they hold in evidence is the momentary snapshot of a particular episodic experience. They/we often build projections of a persona based on our interpretations of only this snapshot!

So, I want to look at some snapshots of people who changed the world, who left their earthly lives this past year. They have not gone anywhere, so long as we continue to live their dream, walk their walk, and grow their teachings. Remembering to continue loving and learning from people who have transitioned from this world is what we do. In a tomorrow afternoon, we will observe Yizkor and lovingly remember that this love never fades.

Just a couple of weeks ago, Shimon Peres passed away. He was the last of the “founding parents” of the state of Israel. He fought

for freedom as a military leader and then came to understand that war begets ... only the next war. He became a soldier for peace. I had the honor of sitting with him and colleagues on several occasions, as we (Reform Rabbis) struggle for recognition and equality for all citizens and residents of Israel. I had never before been in a situation where a person's mere presence changed a room's entire atmosphere. He held that power; any discord left the room as he spoke.

Mr. Peres was a staunch ally of peace and egalitarian co-existence both internationally and domestically. As both Prime Minister and then President of the Israeli government, he made great strides for peace with its Arab neighbors and fought for domestic social justice change. Earlier in his career, he was the

mastermind of settling the West Bank when it became Israel's, after the wars in which it was attacked.

Years later, as he became a soldier for peace he sought to temper them and dismantle them. When asked about his change in priorities, he told reporters: "It's not that I changed my character. I found myself in a different situation." The new world order required different answers. He became the symbol of the movement for peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors — something he promoted until his death. President Barack Obama said, "A light has gone out, but the hope he gave us will burn forever. Shimon Peres was a soldier for Israel, for the Jewish people, for justice, for peace, and for the belief that we can be true to our best selves — to the very end of our time on Earth."

From Nobel Peace Prize recipient Shimon Peres, one of my greatest “take-aways” is his eternal optimism. He gave tangible witness to the words of Theodore Herzl, the founder of Zionism, *“EEM TIRTZU, AEN ZO AGGADAH – IF YOU REALLY WANT IT, IT IS NOT A DREAM.”* He did not care about his legacy. He cared about serving and serving for the good.

Earlier this year, we also lost one of the greatest forces for good, for forgiveness, and for faith. Elie Weisel passed away. Over the many years in which he shared the story of his own nightmare in the Shoah, he taught us how to forgive, how to still love God even after horrific pain, and how to build bridges between each other. He brought us the truth about the horrors of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, and at the same time, he taught us that love and faith overcome any act of hate. He taught is not to stand by

and watch, for the watchers let the atrocities happen. One had to act, for to remain apathetic perpetuated the crime.

On Rosh Hashanah, I shared with you his most profound teaching about God. It is okay to be angry with God. It is not okay to be without faith. After Wiesel's death, the House of Representatives approved a resolution honoring his life with a memorial statue of him at the Capitol. In the process of creating this Congressional bill, our legislators sang tribute to the winner of the Nobel Peace prize, Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Congressional Gold Medal, the National Humanities Medal and the Medal of Liberty.

“Wiesel's moral leadership served as a beacon across our country and around the globe.” Another commented, “Elie Wiesel was one of the greatest examples of good the world has

ever seen. He educated the world about the atrocities of the Holocaust, taught us the true meaning of 'never again,' and devoted his entire life to ridding the world of hate and intolerance."

Down South, Harper Lee died this year. She wrote the classic "To Kill A Mockingbird. The book now appears in over 40 different languages. President George Herbert Walker Bush bestowed the Presidential Medal of Freedom for her "outstanding contribution to America's literary tradition." In this one book, now read by nearly every child matriculating through a literature class, Lee taught that people are people. Whatever their social class, title, or station in life, everyone deserves dignity and respect. She taught us that one had to walk in another's shoes to begin to understand what makes him tick. Perhaps the greatest

lesson that comes from this book is that the world may be unfair, but that was not an excuse to give up trying to change it. Courage is physical, emotional, and mental, and all three are the tools that lead one to live with integrity. Atticus Finch was the perfect living example of this timeless Jewish ethic. From the Talmud we read a story of a man who came to a town where people behaved in the ugliest of ways. He stood on the corner begging people to change their ways. After two years of standing on the corner this way, a young boy came up to him and asked him why he was doing this. It was not working. He replied, "I started, hoping that people would change. Now, I do it to keep me from changing." From Pirke Avot we read, "In a world where no one behaves like a human, strive to be humane."

Muhammad Ali floated like a butterfly and stung like a Bee. His rope-a-dope and flashy feet boxing style made him legendary. Ali was perhaps the greatest boxer in history, but his greatest legacy has nothing to do with his work in the ring. Ali faced many challenges in life and wanted to celebrate the indomitable spirit that could help people fulfill their wildest dreams and face any adversity head on. In planning his own memorial service, he wanted us to use his life and his death as a teaching moment for young people, for this country and for the world. Ali wanted us to remind people who are suffering that he had seen the face of injustice and rose above it. He grew up in discrimination and segregation, and overcame every odd to succeed, never giving in to the temptation of bitterness. Former President Bill Clinton spoke about how Ali found self-empowerment: "He decided that not his race nor his place, the expectations of others, positive,

negative or otherwise would strip from him the power to write his own story."

Affirming this legacy of teaching and bridge building, Ali received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President George W. Bush. He also opened the Muhammad Ali Center in his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky. "I am an ordinary man who worked hard to develop the talent I was given," he said. "I wanted a place that would inspire people to be the best that they could be at whatever they chose to do, and to encourage them to be respectful of one another."

One last person. Esther Jungreis. How many of you have heard about Esther? She died at the age of 80.

You called Cantor and me to serve this congregation ... to help grow Jewish capacity. You want us to grow Jewish enthusiasm.

In my previous two congregations, I have facilitated a lot of congregational growth. I have taught and presided over, as Lori put it when she met me, an inordinate number of conversions. Cantor and I engage people and make you feel at home. For our kids, with the help of our Principal Stephanie Fields, we are the pied pipers of Jewish involvement. With all of this success, we do not hold a candle to the only person ever dubbed, the “Jewish Billy Graham.” Jungreis was a child in Hungary and survived the Holocaust. In 1973, she founded the “Hineni” organization with the aim of helping young Jews find value in Jewish observance. She facilitated colorful rallies, singles events, and lots of programming to bring people back into a “Jewish” conversation. Her history was not her destiny. Surviving the Shoah was not an excuse for victimhood. For Esther, survival was the impetus to celebration and strength. Perhaps even while she is the least

know in this room, she may have represented the greatest of Jewish values. We are Prisoners of hope and Generals in the cause of Justice.

Lori and I are new grandparents. Welcoming a new child into the world makes one stop to think about what might really be going on. As we prepared for Jacob Daniel Buckman's birth, I had to think about the role models and legacies with which I wanted him to be blessed.

This is my grandson (taking out my phone) – this is his “selfie” ...

So, my dear grandson, here is my prayer for you. The world will continue to change around you. Like Shimon Peres, live with the optimism that Peace is always your goal and be the loving beacon of hope that gathers people in its cause. Learn from Elie Wiesel and Harper Lee, that there is no greater tool than faith to heal from even the darkest episodes that life may bring. Love

that you have every day to make a difference in life. Have the courage to stand tall, even against the tide, even if you may not win ... this time, you can still change the world. Be strong and celebrate your faith like Muhammad Ali who never backed down from a righteous challenge and celebrated each victory. As himself, a man of faith, he dedicated his life and legacy to giving every person an opportunity to overcome any obstacle and fulfill his/her life's potential. That, my grandson, is your destiny. By the way, he did it all ... while dancing. From dear Esther, remember that history records the horrors that befall people. She saw the most horrific of nightmares come to life. She also saw the people who held each other and brought light into the darkness. History doesn't record the evenings of celebration as often as we recall the injuries and challenges. Our tradition acknowledges Yahrzeits because we get so stuck in loss that we have to

remember that we have communal families and that the only reason that we mourn is because we loved. Esther charged us to love our tradition and faith every day ... and to do it, loving each other. We are blessed to be here every day ... even when we have to be the one to create the path to that blessing.

In fact, folks, this is my prayer for every new child in the world, in every faith tradition. This is my prayer for those of us still possessing enough child inside of ourselves to remove the blinders and callousness with which our years have jaded us.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel taught us to live with radical amazement, the ability to be wowed by even the simplest of things. Do you remember a time when we experienced greater joy from the potentiality of the box in which the toy came as with the toy itself? Do you remember having pretend friends with whom you could travel the galaxies ... from the security of the

tent ship you made from placing your bed sheets across the dining room chairs? In those days, the world was only "POTENTIAL," and you were the sculptor of its destiny. How many of you remember seeing the movie "Pan" starring Robin Williams? Go watch it again. It is the single greatest movie for Yom Kippur. I dare you to watch it and not remember that you never lose the ability to joyfully change the world until you choose to give up trying. ON this Yom Kippur, reflecting on the snapshots of lives who meant so much to our world; the heroes of history and the loved ones in our lives, I pray for our redemption and our return to hope and inspiration. I pray that the photos that reflect any moment in our lives depict faith and love ... and hope. I pray for a future that brings only loving responses and know that Herzl was right, "*Eem tirtzu, aen zo*

agadah – If you want it, really want to work for it, it can be very real.” Amen and Amen.