

March 8th, 2022 was the 8th anniversary of one of the strangest and most perplexing events that our world has seen over the last number of years. Malaysian Airlines flight 370 has now been missing for over 8 years. I remember from the moment of hearing this story, finding myself deeply engrossed in what could have possibly happened.

In case you've forgotten about the story, here's a brief refresher. On 8 March 2014 while flying from Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Malaysia, to Beijing Capital International Airport in China, the aircraft, operated by Malaysia Airlines, last made voice contact with air traffic control at 01:19 when it was over the South China Sea, less than an hour after takeoff. The aircraft disappeared from air traffic controllers' radar screens at 01:22.

The multinational search effort for the aircraft is the largest and most expensive in aviation history.

Analysis of satellite communications between the aircraft and

Inmarsat's satellite communications network concluded that the

flight continued until at least 08:19. Since then, hundreds of

millions of dollars have been spent on various searches based on

satellite data, Boeing flight data, and floating debris drift data. Hope

was ignited in the early years when debris began showing up in

Africa and on Indian Ocean islands off the coast of Africa, the first

discovered on 29 July 2015. However, the bulk of the aircraft has

still not been located, prompting many theories about its

disappearance.

In the world we live in, where everything feels overly connected and just a click away, the fact that no one seems to know what happened to this plane is mind-boggling. Amid all the curiosity that I believe is still piqued by this story, there's also the heart-wrenching angle. 227 people from all over the world still have mothers, fathers, siblings, husbands, wives, and friends mourning them without any clear understanding of what actually happened to them.

One of the things that you hear about when a plane crashes is the black box. In the initial stages of the search, the little black box was also the little source of hope. The black box pings for a period of time even after a plane has crashed, offering a literal and metaphorical beacon to search teams.

But it also has a downside, because while that hope is initially a salve for the wound, after a while it becomes an anchor, holding the person in place and not allowing them to move forward as much as they'd like. After almost a month, the black box was still in the minds of people as one last chance to find out.

In that little black box, there is all sorts of data. There are logs of how long the airplane was in the air, how high it went, where it turned. In that little black box, there is data that tells us about the engines, whether they were working properly, whether there were any indicators of lights going off or whether anything happened inside the computer on the airplane. Also in that little black box, there are recordings of voices: the pilot and the copilot, maybe even the passengers.

Inside that little black box is a keepsake of the memory of the people who disappeared into the darkness. And we search and we search and we yearn to find them, to bring them back. Even though we'll never see them again, we search to just spend a few seconds, a few moments with them, even as much as it pains us.

In the month after the plane disappeared the black box was the glimmer. It was the one last chance to hear a voice, stir a memory, raise a whisper, but it was also painful. The angst of thinking maybe a miracle will occur!?! I got to thinking about this when trying to unpack the deeper “why” of *Yizkor* on *Pesach* beyond the calendar meaning.

Pesach is one of the most widely celebrated holidays among our people. More than Yom Kippur services and menorah lightings, people love to celebrate the *seder*. Many people's most tangible Jewish memories center around your crazy uncle who used to try to stuff as much real *maror* in his mouth or the first taste of your mom's chopped liver smeared on that first bite of Matzah. *Pesach* is family and family is *pesach*. There are also memories that gnaw at us on Pesach.

There's the chair your parent or grandparent sat in from where they would lead your *seder* until they passed away. There's the *seder* plate you handcrafted with your older sibling when you were kids and every time you look at it, the tears start to well up because they're no longer with us. As many memories as there are that make you sing with joy, there are also those that bring tears.

When this happens during the year, the moments are often few and far between. We see an object or smell a smell, acknowledge it, and then go on with our busy lives, leaving it to float off into the ether.

But *Pesach*, certainly the *sedarim* and even the rest of the days offer us an opportunity that culminates on the 8th day. We are forced to confront those memories in a way that can give us hope, while also introducing palpable pain. *Yizkor* comes at the perfect point because it offers us a channel through which we can healthily process the concentrated dose of longing and anguish.

The Torah tells us that the splitting of the sea and the escape of our ancestors from the Egyptian army took place on the last day of Pesach. The people of Israel never forgot how God saved them from certain death at the hands of the enemy. The people saw the dead bodies of the Egyptians washing ashore and then they realized the great miracle they had just witnessed.

After all the singing and dancing was done, Moses then led the people away from the sea onward in their journey to Mt. Sinai. Only the text here has a strange anomaly. Verse 22 uses the verb, "*Vayasa*" a word that has the connotation that the people left the sea reluctantly. Why were they so attached to this place?



The Midrash in *Mekhilda D' Rabbi Yishmael*, comes to tell us that the Egyptian soldiers decorated their horses and chariots with gold, silver and precious jewels. The Israelites would gather on the shore of the sea every morning to see what precious stones might have washed ashore overnight. The *Midrash* claims that the reason the people of Israel were reluctant to leave was because they wanted to see if the sea would yield up more of the riches that had sunk to the bottom.

Rabbi Neil Kurshan, noted that this is the way many of us feel as human beings in the world. It does not matter if it is a moment of happiness or sadness. We always want to stay where we are and hold on to the feelings of the moment. A child will want to hold on to a familiar doll or blanket to fight feelings of insecurity.

A teenager will hold on to tickets or a corsage that reminds them of a very special date with a friend. We spend thousands of dollars on a wedding album and video so we will remember every moment of this most happy day in our lives. And especially after the death of a loved one, we hold on to something that reminds us of the one we have lost. In each of these cases we cling to the memory, the moment and the object, and we do not allow ourselves to move on in life.

Although that initially feels good, transporting ourselves back into a little time machine to relive those memories is a version of that digging in our heels at the sea. The ground beneath our feet is thick and wet and prevents us from moving forward.

You see, it may not have been greed that kept our ancestors on the shore of the sea. Perhaps they were only looking for a memento. Just like we collect the jewelry, artwork or other tangible reminders of important moments in our life, so too the Israelites were looking for a way to keep the memory of that moment alive by acquiring something that would remind them of this extraordinary event.

We are all here today because we are like the ancient Israelites.

We hold on to the tokens of the lives of those we have lost. We hang on so that the memory will stay with us forever. We do not want to forget a single moment in the lives of those we once loved. We look at the object and we are transported back to the moments when their presence filled our lives and our love for them was full and alive.

It's why *Pesach* is constructed in the way it does. We are tangibly confronted at the beginning with the *seder*. We talk glowingly of the themes of Pesachs gone by, surrounded by our loved ones, and then the memories start to flood back. There is something intoxicating about them.

Were it to remain unchecked, perhaps this treading around the memories of those we have lost would just keep going on, which I think would become overly painful. That is why the Rabbis ingeniously placed *Yizkor* at the end. After the torrent of our own black boxes, those objects that carry us to a time and place that is no longer, we need the reminder of *Yizkor*. We pass the torch as it were to God to do the remembering. There's only so much that we can do until it becomes too much a burden.

They deserve our thoughts, prayers, and wishes. Sit with their presence but do so knowing that the Divine is there with you because only in partnership can this task be successful. So, yes, remember them deeply. Immerse yourself in their legacy.

But remember, don't tarry for too long looking back. It is forward that you must go. Put their memories in God's hands and the Ancient of Days will safeguard them for you until our next collective remembering, when you're ready again to check back in on the memories of your own little black box.

Yehi Zichram Baruch, may the memories of all those remembered today be for a blessing.

Chag Sameach

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