

Yizkor Guide

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What is Yizkor

Yizkor means “may [G!d] remember”. The prayer emerged during the 11th Century, and its primary purpose was to honor the deceased by committing to giving tzedakah in their memory. When we say Yizkor on Yom Kippur, we connect the atonement of the living to the elevation of the souls of the dead. Repairing the world is thus linked to remembering our ancestors, our teachers, our beloved dead.

In many communities, the tradition is to say Yizkor only for the loss of a parent and attending a Yizkor service for the first time can feel like a rite of passage, marking a major loss for the first time. In other communities, including Nishmat Shoom, we invite all who feel called to say Yizkor for their beloved dead, however they define them, or to hold space for the grief of others. In queer communities, often our closest connections and losses are not recognized by mainstream society. And our ancestors may be those who created a space for us in the world, not just those who are related to us.

Rabbi Margaret Holub explains the task of mourning as to “re-cement the bond between body and soul in people facing the internal rift left by the death of a loved one.” Yizkor is an opportunity to remember our dead, to feel them among us, and to support those among us who are deeply grieving. May we remember our dead, repairing the world for future generations who may remember us.

How do I do Yizkor on my own?

This is such a challenging thing. In Jewish tradition, it’s important to have a community of at least ten people present to say the Mourner’s Kaddish. Grief is a thing that is acknowledged and worked through in community. However, during this time, many of us are alone with our grief (or, at least, with fewer than 10 people). In spite of this, we can still find ways to hold one another as we honor our dead.

Entry Point # 1: For those who are observing Yizkor for the first time for someone close to you:

Welcome to Yizkor. Here we are, acknowledging this new reality, crossing over a bridge to a world that somehow still exists but has been forever changed by loss. Take a breath. Breathe in the knowledge of your loss. Does it feel real yet? Perhaps it feels all too real.

Entry Point # 2: For those who are returning to Yizkor to remember your beloved dead:

Welcome back. Here we are again. We are approaching rituals that may be familiar, but in a completely unfamiliar way. Each time we visit with our grief and our beloved dead, time seems to melt away. Was it really more than a year ago? Time is a Capitalist construct, grief is timeless. Grief is outside the confines of time and space, living in our bodies and our memories. It's time to once again greet our lost loved ones and our feeling of loss. Take a breath. We are here again.

Entry Point #3: For those who are feeling the weight of the grief of our world during this time:

The world is heavy with grief and loss. From the societal scourges of COVID-19 and White Supremacy to our own individual losses of community and connection. Take a breath. There are others who have lost all of this and more. We are not alone in our being alone. Still, this grief is difficult to carry. Stop, sit for a while and dwell in this experience of loss, knowing that others are here with you.

Starting the Yizkor ritual:

Find a location that helps you feel connected to your beloved dead or to yourself. Did you light a Yahrzeit candle at the beginning of Yom Kippur? You can go to that candle. Or light a candle now if that's within your practice. If you cannot physically go to a special location, find a peaceful spot and conjure up a remembered location in your mind. What do you see? What sounds do you hear? What does it smell like?

If you can, find a rock to hold, wherever you are.

Now that you have your location and your rock, dive into the songs and texts below. Read, sing, weep, talk with your loved one, talk with the Divine.

If you are able, when you are done, bring your rock to one of the Yizkor altars created by the Nishmat Shoom community. Lay your rock with the other rocks there and know that you are not alone in feeling grief.

Kavanah for Yizkor by Simcha Paull Raphael

Jewish tradition teaches us that between the living and the dead there is a window, not a wall. Yizkor creates a sacred space and time, wherein we can open our hearts and minds to the possibility of a genuine inter-connection with our beloved who have left behind the world of the living. Yizkor is a window. Prepare to open that window...

As you recite Yizkor prayers let your senses and imagination serve as the vehicle of inter-connection with the mysterious world of souls. For whom are you saying Yizkor today? Can you imagine that person's face before your eyes?

Do you recall the sound of their voice? Hear their words as you stand in prayer.

Feel their presence right in this moment. Speak. Listen.

Allow all the radiance of their love to be with you right now.

Yizkor Texts and Prayers

If you would like to sing along with or hear recordings of these texts and prayers, they may be found on the Nishmat Shoom Website in the Menu of Opportunities under Yizkor.

Song: Let the Waves

From Tomorrow by Miner

let the waves wash over me
let the waves wash over me
I am already under
let the waves wash over me

Song: I Will Carry You

By Rena Branson

Vocal accompaniment and production by Baci Weiler

I will carry you through these changes
V'ad seva ani esbol
(When you turn grey, I'll still carry you/be patient with you/bear you)
- Isaiah 46:4

Peach Poem

By Randy Furash-Stewart

How can it be that this peach I am eating grew in the time since you died?
And yet the peach tree was probably alive at the same time as you.
It is still bearing fruit.
I wonder what fruit will continue to grow out of the tree you planted inside my heart.

Song: Blessed Motion

By Annie Zylstra

Blessed Motion is a 4-part acknowledgement of the nature of Life as an unpredictable, ever-changing movement toward itself. The melody came squatting on a rock next to a fast moving fork in the Trinity River, where salmon were in their first week of journeying to their spawning sites in northern California. Martin Prechtel said after surviving the Guatemala earthquake of 1976, during which he witnessed the ground beneath him rising up and swallowing people and villages whole, that solid ground is a myth believed by people who live on the earth rather than in it. This idea has stayed with me through the years and provided partial inspiration for this song.

I believed in solid ground until I saw the earth in motion,
in the winds of steady change and in the ever-rolling ocean.

All moves on in perfect, perfect motion.
All is change and ever-rolling ocean.

Yizkor Meditation for a Deceased Parent who Caused Harm

based on writings by Rabbi Robert Saks

Divine Wisdom, You know my heart.

Indeed, You know me better than I know myself.

So I turn to You before I rise to recite Yizkor.

My emotions swirl as I say this prayer. The parent I remember was not kind to me. His/her/their death left me with a legacy of unhealed wounds, of anger, and of distress and despair that a parent could hurt a child as I was hurt. I do not want to pretend to love or pretend to feel grief that I do not feel. And yet I am here.

Help me, Eternal Breath, to subdue the bitter emotions that chaif my heart,
to alleviate my grief, resentment, and anger for all that could have been, all that should have been.

Help me to find forgiveness, or at least to be soothed by the passage of time.

I pray that I may be released from this desert of pain

and to be escorted to a place inside myself where peace resides.

Amen.

Yizkor prayers in Masculine, Feminine, and Non-binary Hebrew

Rabbi Emily Aviva Kapor-Mater

Yizkor (individually recited memorial prayer)

Masculine (זכר)

יְזַכֵּר אֱלֹהִים נְשָׁמַת _____ שְׁהָלַךְ לְעוֹלָמוֹ. אָנָּה תְּהִי נַפְשׁוֹ צְרוּרָה בְּצָרוֹר הַחַיִּים, עִם
נְשָׁמוֹת אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב, שָׂרָה רִבְקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה, וְעִם שְׂאֵר צְדִיקִים וְצַדִּיקָנוֹת שְׂבָגוּ
עָדָן. תּוֹדִיעֵנִי אֶרְחַח חַיִּים, שְׂבַע שְׂמֻחוֹת אֶת־פְּנֵיךָ, נְעֻמוֹת בִּימִינְךָ נְצַח. אָמֵן.

Yizkor Elohim nish'mat _____ she-halach le-olamo. Ana tehei naf'sho tzerura bi-tz'ror
ha-hayyim, im nish'mot Avraham Yitz'chak ve-Ya'akov, Sarah Rivkah Raheil ve-Lei'ah, ve-im
she'ar tzaddikim ve-tzid'kan'yot she-began eiden. Sova semahot et panecha, ne'imot bi-min'cha
netzah. Amen.

Feminine (נקבה)

יְזַכֵּר אֱלֹהִים נְשָׁמַת _____ שְׁהָלְכָה לְעוֹלָמָהּ. אָנָּה תְּהִי נַפְשָׁהּ צְרוּרָה בְּצָרוֹר הַחַיִּים,
עִם נְשָׁמוֹת אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב, שָׂרָה רִבְקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה, וְעִם שְׂאֵר צְדִיקִים וְצַדִּיקָנוֹת
שְׂבָגוּ עָדָן. תּוֹדִיעֵנִי אֶרְחַח חַיִּים, שְׂבַע שְׂמֻחוֹת אֶת־פְּנֵיךָ, נְעֻמוֹת בִּימִינְךָ נְצַח. אָמֵן.

Yizkor Elohim nish'mat _____ she-hal'cha le-olamah. Ana tehei naf'shah tzerura bi-tz'ror
ha-hayyim, im nish'mot Avraham Yitz'chak ve-Ya'akov, Sarah Rivkah Raheil ve-Lei'ah, ve-im
she'ar tzaddikim ve-tzid'kan'yot she-began eiden. Sova semahot et panecha, ne'imot bi-min'cha
netzah. Amen.

Non-binary (מגדרחב)

יִזְכוֹר אֱלֹהִים נְשָׁמַת _____ שְׁהִלְכָה לְעוֹלָמָהּ. אָנָּה תְּהֵא נִפְשָׁה צְרוּרָה בְּצָרוֹר הַחַיִּים,
עַם נְשָׁמוֹת אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב, שָׂרָה רַבֵּקָה רַחֵל וְלֵאָה, וְעַם שָׂאֵר צְדִיקִים וְצַדִּיקָנוֹת
שְׁבָגָן עֵדָן. תּוֹדִיעֵנִי אֲרַח חַיִּים, שְׁבַע שְׁמַחוֹת אֶת־פְּנֵיךָ, נְעֻמוֹת בִּימִינְךָ נֹצַח. אָמֵן.

Yizkor Elohim nish'mat _____ she-hal'che le-olameh. Ana tehei naf'sheh tzerura bi-tz'ror
ha-hayyim, im nish'mot Avraham Yitz'chak ve-Ya'akov, Sarah Rivkah Raheil ve-Lei'ah, ve-im
she'ar tzaddikim ve-tzid'kan'yot she-began eiden. Sova semahot et panecha, ne'imot bi-min'cha
netzah. Amen.

English Interpretation of the Yizkor prayers above:

Remember, Shechinah/Elohim/Eternal One, the Soul of my (parent, sibling, chosen sibling, etc.), (name of the departed), who has left our world because I will - without making a vow - give charity for them/her/him. In recompense for this, let their/her/his Soul be bound with the Divine Weaver, with the Soul of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah, and with the other righteous ones in the Garden of Eden. In Your presence is fullness of joy, pleasure at Your right hand. Amen.

El Malei (recited aloud on behalf of one who has passed away)

(recording available on playlist)

Masculine (זכר)

אֵל מְלֵא רַחֲמִים, שׁוֹכֵן בְּמְרוֹמִים, הַמְּצֵא מְנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה תַּחַת כְּנָפֵי הַשְּׂכִינָה, בְּמַעְלוֹת
קְדוּשִׁים וְטְהוֹרִים, כְּזֹהַר הַרְקִיעַ מְזִהִירִים, אֶת נְשָׁמַת _____ שְׁהִלְךָ לְעוֹלָמוֹ. אָנָּה בְּעַל
הַרְחָמִים יִסְתִּירֶהוּ בְּסִתְרֵי כְּנָפָיו לְעוֹלָמִים, וְיִצְרוֹר בְּצָרוֹר הַחַיִּים אֶת נְשָׁמָתוֹ. ייִ הוּא
נִחְלָתוֹ, וְיִגּוּחַ בְּשָׁלוֹם עַל מִשְׁכָּבוֹ, וְנֹאמֵר אָמֵן.

El malei rahamim, shochein ba-m'romim, ham'tzei menuha nechona tahat kan'fei ha-sh'china,
be-ma'alot kedoshim u-t'horim, ke-zohar ha-raki'a maz'hirim, et nish'mat _____ she-halach
le-olamo. Ana ba'al ha-rahamim yas'tireihu be-seiter kenafav le-olamim, ve-yitz'ror bi-tz'ror
ha-hayyim et nish'mato. Adonai hu nahalato, ve-yanu'ah be-shalom al mish'kavo, ve-nomar
Amen.

Feminine (נקבה)

אֵל מְלֵא רַחֲמִים, שׁוֹכֵן בְּמְרוֹמִים, הַמְּצֵא מְנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה תַּחַת כְּנָפֵי הַשְּׂכִינָה, בְּמַעְלוֹת
קְדוּשִׁים וְטְהוֹרִים, כְּזֹהַר הַרְקִיעַ מְזִהִירִים, אֶת נְשָׁמַת _____ שְׁהִלְכָה לְעוֹלָמָהּ. אָנָּה
בְּעַל הַרְחָמִים יִסְתִּירֶהָ בְּסִתְרֶהּ כְּנָפָיו לְעוֹלָמִים, וְיִצְרוֹר בְּצָרוֹר הַחַיִּים אֶת נְשָׁמָתָהּ. ייִ
הוּא נִחְלָתָהּ, וְתִגּוּחַ בְּשָׁלוֹם עַל מִשְׁכָּבָהּ, וְנֹאמֵר אָמֵן.

El malei raḥamim, shochein ba-m'romim, ham'tzei menuḥa nechona taḥat kan'fei ha-sh'china, be-ma'alot kedoshim u-t'horim, ke-zohar ha-raki'a maz'hirim, et nish'mat _____ she-hal'cha le-olamah. Ana ba'al ha-raḥamim yas'tireha be-seiter kenafav le-olamim, ve-yitz'ror bi-tz'ror ha-ḥayyim et nish'matah. Adonai hu naḥalatah, ve-tanu'ah be-shalom al mish'kavo, ve-nomar Amen.

Non-binary (מגדרחב)

אל מלא רחמים, שוכן במרומים, המצא מנוחה נכונה תחת כנפי השכינה, במעלות קדושים וטהורים, כזהר הרקיע מזהירים, את נשמת _____ שהלכה לעולמה. אנא בעל הרחמים יסתירה בסתר כנפיו לעולמים, ויצרור בצרור החיים את נשמתה. ?? הוא נחלתה, וינוכה בשלום על משכבה, ונאמר אמן.

El malei raḥamim, shochein ba-m'romim, ham'tzei menuḥa nechona taḥat kan'fei ha-sh'china, be-ma'alot kedoshim u-t'horim, ke-zohar ha-raki'a maz'hirim, et nish'mat _____ she-hal'che le-olameh. Ana ba'al ha-raḥamim yas'tirehe be-seiter kenafav le-olamim, ve-yitz'ror bi-tz'ror ha-ḥayyim et nish'mateh. Adonai hu naḥalateh, ve-yanuḥe be-shalom al mish'kaveh, ve-nomar Amen.

English interpretation of El Malei:

G!d, full of mercy, Who dwells in the highest places, grant perfect repose beneath the wings of Your presence, amongst the holy and pure ones who shine as brightly as the sky, to _____, who has gone to his/her/their eternal home. Please, Masterful One of mercy, keep him/her/them with You forever, and let his/her/their soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life. Adonai is his/her/their inheritance, and may he/she/they rest in peace. And let us say: Amen.

Mourner's Kaddish | קדיש יתו

The Mourner's Kaddish is traditionally said with a minyan of 10 adults. We know that it may be hard to find a minyan at this time (especially if you are not using technology during the Yom Kippur). However, we have included the text here in case you would like to use it.

יתגדל ויתקדש שמה רבא
בעלמא די ברא כרעותה
וימליך מלכותה בחייכון וביומיכון ובחיי דכל בית ישראל
בעגלא ובזמן קריב ואמרו אמן

יְהִי שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעַלְמֵי וּלְעַלְמֵי עַלְמֵיָא:

יְתְבָרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח
וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא
וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל
שְׁמֵהּ דְקוּדְשָׁא, בְּרִיךְ הוּא
לְעֵלָא וּלְעֵלָא
מְכַל בְּרַכְתָּא וְשִׁירְתָּא,
תְּשַׁבַּחְתָּא וְנַחֲמְתָּא,
דְּאִמְרֵן בְּעַלְמָא, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן:
יְהִי שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמֵיָא

וְחַיִּים

עַלְיְנֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן:
עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרְוֵי
הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם
עַלְיְנֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל

עַל כָּל יוֹשְׁבֵי תַבְל

וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן:

*Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba
b'alma di v'ra chirutei,
v'yamlich malchutei,
b'chayeichon uv'yomeichon
uv'chayei d'chol beit Yisrael,
baagala uviz'man kariv,
v'im'ru: **Amein.***

*Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varach
l'alam ul'almei almaya.*

*Yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpaar
v'yitromam v'yitnasei,
v'yit'hadar v'yitaleh v'yit'halal
sh'mei d'kud'sha b'rich hu,
l'eila u'le'ela min kol birchata v'shirata,
tushb'chata v'nechemata,
daamiran b'alma, v'imru: **Amein.***

Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya, v'chayim aleinu v'al kol Yisrael, v'imru: Amen.
Oseh shalom bimromav, Hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu, v'al kol Yisrael, ve'al kol yoshvei teyvel v'imru:
Amein

Mourner's Kaddish Interpretation
By Elliott batTzedek

So often am I lost,

yet through the pall, yet through the tarnish, show me the way back,
through my betrayals, my dismay, my heart's leak, my mind's sway,
eyes' broken glow, groan of the soul—which convey all that isn't real,
for every soul to These Hands careen. And let us say, amen.

Say you will show me the way back, my Rock, my Alarm. Lead the way, Oh my Yah

And yet in shock and yet in shame and yet in awe and yet to roam and yet to stay
and yet right here and yet away and yet —“Halleluyah!” my heartbeat speaks, for You
live in all this murk and too in the clear and too in our wreckage.
You are the mirror of our souls, let us say: amen

Life may harm me, rob me, ream me raw, try me, even slay me
Over all You will prevail. And let us say: Amen

Say You shall loan me a tomorrow, Say You shall loan another day to all who are called
Yisrael and all called Yishmael and all called We and They, and let us say, Amen

Song: Kosi R'vayah כּוֹסֵי הַיַּיִן

My cup overflows (Psalm 23:5)

Chant composed by Shefa Gold

Paths of Fullness: An Interpretation of Psalm 23
By Rabbi Brant Rosen

The Holy one is my Guide; my life is whole.
We journey together over fertile hillsides
and rest beside nourishing springs.
This is my spirit ever renewed,
for my Guide leads me down paths of fullness.

Even when my steps lead into the kingdom of death
I do not fear for I know You are with me.
Your presence, Your shelter is a comfort to me.
With You I can set myself aright in the face of deepest sorrow;
and soon my **cup of joy is filled to overflowing.**
As I journey on, nothing but kindness and love
shall follow until the day I finally return
to my Source, my destination.

We Remember Them by Sylvan Kamens & Rabbi Jack Riemer

At the rising sun and at its going down; We remember them.
At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter; We remember them.
At the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring; We remember them.
At the blueness of the skies and in the warmth of summer; We remember them.
At the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of the autumn; We remember them.
At the beginning of the year and when it ends; We remember them.
As long as we live, they too will live, for they are now a part of us as We remember them.
When we are weary and in need of strength; We remember them.
When we are lost and sick at heart; We remember them.
When we have decisions that are difficult to make; We remember them.
When we have joy we crave to share; We remember them.
When we have achievements that are based on theirs; We remember them.
For as long as we live, they too will live, for they are now a part of us as, We remember them.

Song: Naye Lebn

Poem by Lila Serene, translated by Lila & her mom Ana Goldenberg.
Melody by Margot Seigle

naye lebn

dayne
zise oygn farshpreyt
fris tsit fun eybikeyt arop
greyt, hungeric
oysgish bagleybtkyte azoy vi honic dekn mid harts
onton a bissle fargenign azoy vi vesne regn gebakt in der shmek fun frish likht
du bist punkt genoy gekumen aher
biz a hor ven du kumft iz der merste veytikeyt
un ich tsuher zich
hent aroysraysn tfilin fun lipn farstitert
doziker beyner fartriknt megn beygn gehnuk niderik
kushn dos erd gehnuk tsertlekh
zayn bagrisn ba der mikdesh
fun vos du host gekumen aher tsulernen.

translation:

new life.

Your
Wide sweet eyes
Fresh plucked from eternity
Ready hungry
pouring trust like syrup over tired hearts
a sprinkling of joy like spring rain steeped in the scent of fresh light
you are right on time
right when you're needed most
and I am listening
palms pressing prayers through trembling lips
may these drying bones bend low enough
to kiss this earth gently enough
to be received at the altar
of what you've come here to teach.