Shamor v' Zachor
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Before President Ronald Regan died, his devoted wife Nancy gave an interview to Barbara Walters on one of her TV specials. In the interview Mrs. Regan was asked to describe for the audience what it was like to care for a person with Alzheimer's Disease, as her husband was currently suffering from it. She explained that it was the most dreadful disease because it not only takes away your future, your hopes and dreams and aspirations as so many life ending diseases do, but it takes away your past was well; your memory and history. It robs, she said from both ends of your life, like a candle that burns at both ends and eventually when those two ends meet you are left with nothing but ashes; no unfulfilled dreams of the future, not even the memory of the past.

I thought a lot about this interview over these last few weeks as the world and each of us prepared for the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. My mind has been struggling to comprehend its deeper meaning beyond a date on the calendar. What does it mean to be 60 years from Auschwitz? What does it mean to me, a relatively young man who never knew first hand those horror filled years and has only learned of them from pictures, movies and in a very limited ways from the personal accounts of survivors. I may not be the typical example of the modern American Jewish 30 something, as I did travel to Auschwitz on the March of the Living as a teenager and I have very poignant experiences and memories of that week touring the camps to draw upon. But in a general sense what does 60 years since Auschwitz mean to any of us who did not go through it, what does it mean to the generations being born today who will

never know a survivor, who will never hear first hand of the great devastation that happened there?

In asking these questions I realized that I am not the first, nor is our generation the first to ask them. Throughout our history as a people we have asked the very same questions; if not on the anniversary of Auschwitz, then on the destruction of the Biblical Temple, on the Macbeean revolt, the Exodus from Egypt; the inquisition in Spain, the Pogroms of Eastern Europe. And one day we will ask what does it mean to be 60 years since 9/11, or the tsunami, or the Crisis in the Sudan?

Throughout the history of the world, the generation of the present has entrusted for safe keeping the memory and lessons of its greatest tragedies to the generations of the future. Our most poignant and formative experiences as a people are given into the hands of those who never had them, like one would place a family Kiddush cup, or Shabbat candle sticks into the hands of a grandchild with the whispered words, keep these safe, remember these, protect these, don't let these come to be for naught.

And so into our hands the world has placed the 60 year old memory of Auschwitz and all that happened there and everywhere during the Holocaust. What do we do with this memory, what do we do with this responsibility?

The answer, as is so often the case can be found in the Torah. But not just anywhere in the Torah, in the space between this week's Torah portion and one that occurs more than 2 books hence in Deuteronomy. It is in that space that we find what to do with this awesome obligation to the past and responsibility to the future.

In this week's parsha, Yitro, we come upon the great Sinai Moment, when the children of Israel stood as the base of Mt Sinai and Moses proclaimed to them from on top the mountain the 10 commandments. And it is in the forth commandment that Moses declares *Zachor et yom hashabat lkadsho* / REMEMBER the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Nearly half the Torah later Moses repeats this commandment in his final words to the Jewish people, but when he repeats it he changes one very important word, the word Zachor / Remember instead this time he says Shamor / Protect.

Did Moses get it wrong, did he not remember the words of God as he heard them? I mean he had them written down on a tablet that they had been carrying through the desert for 40 years, surely he could have looked them up. Why did he change the words? Is it the first example of a flip-flop?

The midrash takes up this questions and explains that when God first spoke the words of the 10 commandments he said both words as though they were one, an example of linguistic gymnastics that only God and perhaps a politician could perform.

But I think there is another explanation and it has to do with a word that was not changed in either rendition, not Shabbat but the other word Kodesh. In both instances God refers to the Shabbat as Kodesh as holy, and I think that this is there to tell us that when something is holy we must remember it and we must protect it. And that message too is the Torah's answer and every generation's answer to the question what do we do with the 60 year old memory of Auschwitz. We remember it and we protect it, for it is holy. Not because of what man did there, indeed there was nothing holy in the atrocities of the Nazis, but because of the people whose lives were obliterated in the furnace of that horrible time. Like the candle that burns at both ends they lost there future and they lost

there past. And their lives and what befell theme there is our sacred trust, to remember and to protect, or they are like the candle that burns out, merely ashes.

How do you explain that to someone who was not there? How do you impress the holiness of that sacred compact upon the minds of the generations to come? It is a question for each of us. I found my answer in the space between Zachor and Shamor. What happens there in Leviticus and Numbers is the Jewish people learn what it truly means to be Jewish. They learn the why and the how of the covenant between God and the Jewish people.

Therefore, for me at least the question I must answer for myself and for my family 60 years after Auschwitz is do we know the why and the how of what happened there? If a generation, any generation only knows what happened at Auschwitz, or what happened on 9/11 or what happened when the temple fell in ancient Jerusalem, then they do not know enough. We learn nothing from what! Learning takes place in the why and the how. Why did the Nazi's kill 6 million Jews? Daniel Goldhagen, author of Hitler's Willing Executioners summarized in this week's LA Times:

"Although other factors also contributed to their participation, the people persecuting, torturing and killing Jews were believing and willing executioners, in the grip of a profound anti-Semitism that held Jews to be the secular incarnation of the Antichrist and therefore necessary to extirpate... Just two weeks ago, a German guard at Auschwitz confessed to the BBC the truth: that he thought back to his time in the camp with "joy." There was "always behind you the fact that the Jews are enemies…. A feeling of sympathy or empathy didn't come up. The children are not the enemy at the moment. The enemy is the blood in them." Slaughtering Jews, he believed, was "right." "

How did they do it? They did it as the world watched and did not believe or did not take notice. They did it by exploiting long held racial and anti-Semitic sentiments that went unchecked and uncorrected for far too long. They did it in the same way that every genocide throughout history has been perpetrated. They justified their actions with flawed logic, waited for the world to call them on it, and when no one tried to stop them they went right ahead and did what they said they were going to do.

Shamor v' zachor, protect and remember because the memory of what happened to our people there is holy. That is our sacred trust and obligation to the souls that burned up there more than 60 years ago, and to the souls that are burning and dying right now in the Sudan, in Darfur, and anywhere people do not treat each other's lives as kodesh, as holy. We must guard and protect both the memory of the past and our hope in the future, like a candle that burns at both ends we must squelch the fire of ignorance, the fire of hatred, the fire genocide. Because the past is a holy memory and the future our sacred trust, and before the fire that burns inside of man, consumes everything and all we are left with is ashes.