

The Secret for Good Memory

Category: Holidays, Rosh Hashana

The Holiday of Remembrance

How To Avoid Decline

Dementia is one of the most common conditions among older people; currently, there are no less than 50 million people globally living with dementia, and researchers are saying that this number could triple by the year 2050.

Recently, some British scientists came up with a way to identify individuals over 50 who might get dementia down the road, a remarkable 14 years before it actually shows up, and Professor Yoram Yuval, a distinguished brain expert and psychiatrist from Israel, was interviewed on how to stop this disease in its tracks. His answer was straightforward but maybe a bit tough to hear. He said that once dementia kicks in, it's too late, but for most people, it can be entirely prevented *by keeping their brains active*.

That means doing what you're into and love to do. He stressed that it's not just about memory games; you've got to stay engaged with life's challenges—in other words, you need to stay in the workforce.

Now, you don't have to keep doing the exact same job, but you do need to keep up with something that really matters to you and keeps your brain working. That usually means connecting with others, too. One such option is volunteering to help kids with learning difficulties. However, it should be a major part of your life, at least 50% of your time; not just a casual thing.

Another piece of advice was to learn a new language. This is hard and challenging and would definitely exercise the brain.

This advice isn't just for those worried about dementia - it's for everyone. People are living longer these days, and the goal is to make sure your brain doesn't quit before you do. As Professor Yuval says, your brain is like a muscle - you've got to use it, or you'll lose it.

The Rebbe always believed in keeping people engaged in meaningful work. One famous story is about Rabbi Moshe Rosen, who was the chief rabbi of Romania from the 1960s.

In the early 1970s, when he was in his sixties, he expressed his desire to retire. However, the Rebbe advised him against it. Fast forward to the 1980s, when Rabbi Rosen visited New York and had a private meeting with the Rebbe. To his shock and surprise, the Rebbe remarked, "I heard that you bought an apartment in Israel." This was not public information, but somehow the Rebbe knew, and encouraged him to avoid making aliyah and instead persist in his role.

He asked the Rebbe when he could finally relax, and the Rebbe replied, "When you reach my age, we will talk." At that time, Rabbi Rosen was in his seventies, and the Rebbe in his eighties. A decade later, in 1991, Rabbi Rosen had another private audience with the Rebbe, and the Rebbe made it abundantly clear that he served a critical role in Romania and needed to continue his work. ("Shemen Sason Meichaveirecha," Volume 4, Page 190.)

The Day of Remembering

Why am I bringing up dementia?

Well, Rosh Hashanah is referred to as "Yom Hazikaron" in the Torah - the Day of Remembrance. It's a day when we pray that the Almighty "remembers us for good."

Now, in a few moments, we'll be reciting the Musaf prayer, and it has a section all about memories. It follows a tradition from the Talmud that tells us to focus on three themes in our prayers: 'Kingship,' which is about recognizing G-d as our King, 'Remembrance,' where we ask to be remembered favorably by G-d, and 'Shofar'—the main mitzvah of the day which makes the "Kingship" and "Remembrance" a reality (Rosh Hashanah 34b).

This section of "Remembrance" contains ten verses, three from the Torah, three from the Psalms, three from the Prophets, and a tenth verse to conclude from the Torah. Our sages picked verses that recall the positive moments in the history where G-d remembered humanity and the Jewish people, and when we recite these verses, we're essentially asking the Almighty to remember us in the same

way He remembered humanity during those significant events.

If learning a new language is good exercise for the brain, certainly learning a new concept in the Torah will do the same. Let's utilize this opportunity right here and now to exercise our brain by examining some of the verses in the prayer of Zichronos - Remembrance.

The Zoo in the Cage

The first verse we mention comes from the story of Noah, where we read about the great flood that engulfed the entire world, leaving Noah and his family as the sole survivors. They had been inside the ark for a full 150 days, caring for all the animals and creatures that joined them in the ark—literally running a zoo inside a sealed container. Then, the Torah tells us, “And G-d remembered Noah and all the living creatures and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And G-d made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided” (Genesis 8:1).

Remember that the actual flood lasted only forty days, but the waters remained so high that the ark continued to drift for more than a hundred days after the flood ended. When G-d remembered Noah, the waters finally began to recede, and eventually, Noah and his family emerged from the ark.

The second verse that speaks about remembrance is from the book of Exodus, when the Israelites were in Egypt and suffering under the oppression of the Egyptians. At that time, the verse says, “And G-d heard their groaning, and G-d remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Exodus 2:24); this is immediately followed by the story of Moses and the burning bush, where G-d revealed Himself to Moses and tells him to redeem the Jewish people. Once again, we turn to G-d and say, Just as You remembered the people of Israel in Egypt and redeemed them, please remember us today and look upon us with the same compassion and mercy as You did then.

Let's skip to two more verses, both from the prophet Jeremiah.

The first one is from Jeremiah's first prophecy, where G-d sends him to speak to the people of Israel. G-d tells Jeremiah to say to them: “Thus says the Lord: I remember you for the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown” (Jeremiah 2:2).

What's this all about?

Imagine this relationship as if it were a young couple. The husband has a dream of going to a distant land, let's say Australia, with the hope of becoming a millionaire someday. Currently, he's broke, he has no idea where they'll live when they get there, and there's no job waiting for him. All he has is a dream. But the young wife believes in him, leaves her childhood home, and follows her husband to this foreign land, to a place she's never been before.

Many years pass, and the husband achieves his dreams. On their 50th wedding anniversary, now a multi-millionaire, surrounded by children, grandchildren, family, and friends, the husband turns to his wife and says, "I will always remember your 'kindness of your youth'—that you followed me to nowhere, in search of my dream; it was with your support that I've come this far."

This is what G-d is telling the people of Israel in his message through Jeremiah. When He sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt, He asked them to follow Him into the wilderness. They didn't ask what they would eat in the desert or where they would find medicine for the elderly or diapers for the babies. Instead, they trusted in G-d and followed Him into the desert. That's why the prophet, speaking on behalf of G-d, says, "I remember the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown." G-d will always remember the loyalty of His people, just as that husband will always remember the support of his wife in pursuing his dreams.

The second verse also comes from the book of Jeremiah.

In those days, the Jewish people were split between two kingdoms: the Kingdom of Judah, which was smaller, poorer, and more religious, and the Kingdom of Israel (ruled by kings from the tribe of Ephraim) which was wealthier, more successful, and also very pagan. By the time of Jeremiah, most of the Kingdom of Israel had already fallen in conquest, and its people exiled and assimilated among other nations.

But for the survivors among the descendants of Ephraim who remained in the land of Israel, G-d sends the prophet with a message of reconciliation, saying, "Ephraim is a dear son to Me" - He calls them beloved, like a precious son, despite their past actions. He assures them, "For whenever I speak of him, I still remember him" (Jeremiah 31:19). G-d shares His own emotions; "My insides

churn for him” - every time He remembers them, He feels a stirring within Him; His innermost feelings are awakened by the memory of Ephraim.

This verse is just one before the last in that section of Musaf; it represents our quest to awaken G-d’s mercy and longing—even for His children who strayed and assimilated. Because as Jeremiah says in the name of G-d; despite everything, He loves us, has compassion for us, and remembers us.

Zachor—A Call to Action

The renowned Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel, had a close relationship with the Rebbe. Mr. Wiesel was deeply committed to the cause of remembrance—in ensuring that the Holocaust would always be etched in our collective memory.

After the Holocaust, he carried a heavy burden of disappointment in humanity and a lack of belief in the future. In those early years, he hesitated to start a family.

But the Rebbe persistently encouraged him to marry and establish a family. In one of the letters exchanged between them, the Rebbe wrote that “Zachor”—the mitzvah to remember—is a positive commandment, one that needs to be carried out in action (Igros Kodesh v. 23 pg. 374).

In other words, “remember” is a call to action—much like the instances we read in the verses we mentioned, when G-d remembered Noah and guided him out of the ark, and when He remembered the Israelites and led them out of Egypt.

So, when we implore G-d to “remember” us, we’re essentially asking for His active intervention in our lives. There is no doubt that when we remember G-d through Mitzvos and good deeds, He reciprocates by remembering us and blessing us with a year filled with goodness and sweetness.