

Signposts Along the Journey of Memory: *Yizkor's* Work from *Shavuot* to *Yom Kippur*

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Have you every noticed that when *Yizkor* appears, especially four times a year, that just two of those moments—*Shavuot* and *Yom Kippur*—form a kind of spiritual corridor? *Shavuot* opens it; *Yom Kippur* seals it. And in the months between them, memory does its quiet, persistent work. Memory is not a single act but a set of movements—bodily, narrative,

sensory, ethical, as I was reminded in Mark Rowlands recent book, *The Book of Memory: How We Become Who We Are* (2025). Each movement of memory is already stirring at *Shavuot*, and each one matures by the time we reach *Yom Kippur*.

At our recent *Mirpeset Shabbat*, as the sun traced the downtown Dayton horizon between the trees and music drifted across our the tablets of our hearts, I kept thinking about Bob Dylan's performance in Dayton just weeks ago. I was touched by his rendition of a lyric he co-wrote with Robert Hunter:

"Forgetful heart
Lost your power of recall
Every little detail
You don't remember at all
The times we knew
Who would remember better then you..."

—it felt like a commentary on the season we're entering. Not the season of holidays, but the season of remembering: the long arc from *Shavuot's* first fruits to *Yom Kippur's* final sealing. Consider these signposts along the road of memory's movements.

Firstly, there is "involuntary memory," which for Rowlands is the memory that rises unbidden. On *Shavuot*, it often arrives gently: a scent, a melody, a face that flickers in the mind. By *Yom Kippur*, those same memories have sharpened. What was

once a whisper becomes a presence. The heart remembers even when the mind insists it does not. Dylan's gravelly phrasing captured that truth—the ache of a heart that forgets and remembers at the same time.

Then secondly, there is "narrative memory"—the stories we tell to make sense of who we are. *Shavuot* gives us the first Jew by choice, our matriarch, Ruth, whose story is braided from loss, loyalty, and courage. Ruth's narrative memory becomes moral direction. By *Yom Kippur*, we are invited to do the same: to look at the stories we've inherited, the ones we've lived, and the ones we still need to write. Between the two *Yizkors*, narrative memory becomes a form of spiritual editing.

Thirdly, there is "sensory memory," which for Rowlands is the memory that arrives like weather. On *Shavuot*, it may be the taste of cheesecake or the melody of *Akdmut*. By *Yom Kippur*, it's the sound of *Kol Nidrei* or the feel of a *tallit* wrapped around the shoulders. These sensations are not decorations; they are carriers of meaning. Dylan's performance reminded us how a single chord can return us to a moment we didn't know we were missing.

And finally, "ethical memory"—the memory that asks something of us. *Shavuot* plants the seed: remember those who shaped you. By *Yom Kippur*, that seed has grown into responsibility. Ethical memory is not nostalgia; it is a call to action. It is the insistence that the people we remember still expect something from us.

Between *Shavuot* and *Yom Kippur*, memory is not dormant. Memory is ripening, it is teaching. Memory is shaping the heart that sometimes forgets and sometimes remembers too much. And as Dylan reminded us, crowning lyrically on his last *Rough and Rowdy Ways* tour in Dayton, even a "forgetful heart" can learn to recall what matters—to recall how our individual call to action can transform the past worlds of our lives into a redemptive future now.



PrayerLab Shabbat

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Saturday, June 13th & July 11th @ 9:30 am