

A few summers ago, I took an online DNA test through a genealogy website. The results confirmed what I knew about both sides of my family. There were no surprises about the regions of origin of my parents, grandparents, or those who came before them. The percentages of this or that all made sense based on the information that I had always been told about my own, personal ancestors.

What was more surprising to me was how easy it was to hook into the genealogical research that others in my extended family had already done. Cousins on the Jewish side had a lot figured out already for three or four generations, which I think is a pretty significant accomplishment given the early 20<sup>th</sup> century immigration of those relatives. On my non-Jewish side, however, the part that is entirely English and Welsh – the Thomas side – people were able to connect the dots back 10 generations. I could easily and readily see when members of certain lines came to this country, what regions they were associated with in Wales, and what historical figures they might have had contact with. It was stunning.

In August, I came across a meme on facebook that was entitled “Ancestral Mathematics”

It read:

In order to be born, you needed:

2 parents

4 grandparents

8 great-grandparents

16 second great-grandparents

32 third great-grandparents

All the way up to

2048 ninth great-grandparents

For you to be born today from 12 previous generations, you needed a total of 4094 ancestors over the last 400 years.

Consider these individuals – How many struggles? How many challenges? How much sadness or joy or hope or love or courage had to exist for you to be born today.

Baruch Atah Adonai – Eloheinu veilohei avoteinu v'imoteinu – Elohei Avraham, Elohei Yitzchak veilohei Ya'akov; Elohei Sarah, Elohei Rivkah, Elohei Racheil. Veilohei Leah...

Blessed are You, Adonai, the Amida begins, God of our forefathers and foremothers – God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob; God of Sarah, God of Rebecca, God of Rachel, and God of Leah.

Each time we pray these words, we are reminded that the God who is with each of us was also beside and within each of our ancestors. Judaism provides us a telescope into the distant past to remind us that we are, collectively and as individuals, a part of the story of humanity moving through time.

Our textual tradition gives us ample reminders that we are obligated to ensure that children learn the lessons of our people. An easy reminder that is included in our liturgy is Deuteronomy 6:7, found in the V'ahavta – “You shall teach them – the Mitzvot – diligently to your children.”

The implication in all of this is, that if both God and ancestors existed in the past, then God and descendants will exist in the future.

Jewish tradition gives us the image of *shalshet hakabbalah* – the chain of received tradition, passed from generation to generation. We are positioned in an unbroken chain of human life – inheriting and imparting all types of things – thought, culture, genetics, trauma, and tradition. Jewish practice is set up in a way to remind us of this greater story.

Link after link exists but can only be forged through the miracles of birth, life, and death. We are born, we live, and we die - each life – no matter how brief - a brilliant, shining circle in existence, tied inextricably to those who came before and after, and those we encounter along the way.

It's a beautiful picture. Silver chains of souls, moving through time, a sort of interconnected chain mail of lives, a natural order of beginning and endings. We each have 2048 ninth great-grandparents. They ate breakfast and went to bed each night, just as we do. They each lived and died and we only live because they did.

I wonder about those breakfasts 400 years ago. [No, I didn't say breakfasts – although that is coming soon enough.] But – breakfasts – the daily nourishment that one takes in having traversed the darkness of night.

We will never know what they ate for breakfast, their preferences, what their kitchens smelled like. They are the distant past, honored, acknowledged, remembered, and considered so that we might have a glimpse of our place in eternity.

Yet there are ancestors whose breakfasts we know and whose kitchens we can still smell if we close our eyes and allow ourselves to be silent and still long enough for the wisps of the past to the surface of our memory.

Whose kitchen would you sit in, if you could – just one more time? Whose table would you sit at and what would you talk about? What would they eat for breakfast on a Tuesday – or on a holiday – or if someone special was visiting? Maybe it isn't breakfast – maybe it was a class or a lesson or a basketball game or a company party or a movie. Where would you be and how would you feel? What would you smell and what would you taste if you were with them, again.

Yizkor – Remember – what it was like to be in their presence. All of the parts of the memory. The good parts and the hard parts, the sad parts and the parts that made you feel the most tremendous sense of who you are. Remember them all, your people who have gone – your people who have become ancestors.

Your link in the chain of tradition is as it is because of them. You are who you are because of breakfasts and stories and walks and books and conversation. You are who you are because they were who they were.

Yom Kippur calls us each year to live with the knowledge that we will become ancestors. One day we will be 9<sup>th</sup> great-grandparents or great-grand teachers or aunts and uncles. Sooner than that, we will become the memories of those we love most dearly. And, on this day each year, we are called to choose life – and inscription in the Book of Life Well Lived – filled with experiences shared, kindness, generosity, presence – and breakfasts, that we may each fill the pots of memory of those who live alongside us and will go on after us as each one of us, inevitably becomes an ancestor.

But for now. For just a few moments. Before we return the business of living life, let us sit with their memories. Let us sit at their tables and share a meal again – in our hearts, our minds, in the places of our soul where we know they still reside.

We take this time for silent memory.