

## Yizkor Thoughts Shemini Atzeret 5778

In talking to many grieving families over the years, a consistent theme I hear is that of 'no regrets.' 'She lived to be ninety five and was widely loved, what more could we ask for;' 'He was married for 50 years and always said he wouldn't have changed a thing.' I include those sentiments in the eulogy without remark, but I wonder: Really? Knowing how many things in life develop from random events, observing the slow drifting apart of relationships, admitting how many things happened because of impulsive or poorly thought through choices, no regrets?

What if Mom hadn't gone to that dance where she met Dad? Would the man she married have been even better than Dad? When they had their years of conflict, but stayed together (or separated), was it really the right decision? School choices, spouse choices, job choices, Jewish choices: the possible pasts we leave behind are staggering in their infinite variety. Don't we wonder what might have been? Don't we think about how life would have been different with just a few small decisions? If we were willing to consider the possibility of having missed out on something, we would have to admit to some regret about not having done all we could to make the most of life, to make up with those from whom we are estranged, to do be the people we thought we would be.

And that is why we say we have no regrets. It's like asking someone how they are when we first greet them. They're fine; they're good; they're great! We are not really asking too deeply, and they are not answering too fully. If we ask someone near the end of their life about their regrets, it would take a supreme amount of courage to answer honestly and in full, about all the things that could have happened and should have happened. Instead, the dying let go of their regrets; they don't burden the survivors with tzuris they neither want nor need; they bury any regrets, just as they themselves will soon be buried.

That is a great act of hesed, of love and kindness. It makes it possible for us to remember them with the fewest possible regrets ourselves. By purposely omitting stories about what might have been, we are left with only those about what was, and our tendency at that moment is to emphasize the good times, the positive attributes, the values passed on. We pray yizkor for them still curious about the details of their stories, still intrigued by the twists and turns of lives whose outcome was never as clear while being lived as they were at their conclusion. We return to them the blessing of a remembrance of a life lived without regrets.