

If I were to ask you to think of all the days in a year and pick out the ones you remember most clearly, you might think of birthdays, anniversaries, lifecycle moments, or major transitions.

Most of the days between them blur together. But certain dates become markers in the way we tell the story of our lives.

We remember the joy of a child's birth, the anguish of losing someone we loved, or the anticipation of beginning something new.

And we remember those days differently from the way we remember, say, an important conversation from last week. Over time, some of the details fade. What remains is the significance of the day itself — what changed because it happened, and who we became afterward.

They become, in a sense, days to be remembered.

Rosh Hashanah is one of those days. In fact, our tradition gives it a name that says just that: *Yom HaZikaron* — the Day of Remembrance.

That name raises an obvious question: what, exactly, are we supposed to remember?

Jewish memory is rarely about nostalgia. We do not remember just because something happened a long time ago. We remember because the past tells us something about who we are in the present. The stories we inherit become part of the language with which we understand ourselves.

And that is especially clear in the Torah reading for this morning.

In Genesis 22, Abraham and Isaac are walking together toward Mount Moriah. Isaac sees the wood and the fire, and then he notices that something is missing.

He turns to Abraham and asks: “Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?”

It is a practical question. Isaac understands what an offering is supposed to look like. He sees the fire and the wood, and because he knows enough about the ritual, he knows there should also be an animal.

That small detail is easy to overlook.

Before Isaac ever asks the question, he has already been taught enough to know what he is looking at.

Somewhere along the way, the religious world of his father has started to become familiar to him.

And that is how Jewish tradition moves from one generation to another.

Long before any of us can fully explain what Judaism means to us, we begin receiving its language, its stories, its practices, and its rhythms. Someone teaches us enough that, eventually, we are able to ask our own questions.

Every generation inherits something before it fully understands what it has received. And over time, each of us has to decide what place that inheritance will have in our lives.

Perhaps that is part of what Rosh Hashanah asks us to remember: not simply what happened before us, but that we are inheritors of a story that began long before we arrived.

That process has been part of my own Jewish story for as long as I can remember.

My mother is Jewish, and my father was Roman Catholic. Many interfaith families find meaningful and beautiful ways to honor more than one tradition in their homes. That was not the situation in the house where I grew up.

My father did not want Judaism in our home – at all – and he did not want my brother or me raised Jewish.

My mother, however, never allowed us to forget who we are.

She would tell us that because we were born to a Jewish mother, we were Jewish, and nobody could take that away from us.

And quietly, she began telling me the stories of our people.

She told me stories about Jews who had held onto their identity when doing so was difficult or dangerous. Stories of people who sacrificed enormously simply for the right to remain who they knew themselves to be.

Those stories stayed with me.

Because Judaism was something I couldn't openly practice, I became even more curious about it. Eventually, I realized that if I wanted to know the tradition my mom said belonged to me, I would have to learn it myself.

At night, I would take out the *Illustrated Bible for Jewish Children* that my mom had given me for Hanukkah (on the down low).

And I would read.

Creation. Noah. Abraham and Sarah. Jacob. Joseph. Moses and the Exodus.

Little by little, I started to fill in the gaps.

Looking back, I realize that those nights were about more than learning unfamiliar stories. Something deeper was happening.

I wasn't discovering someone else's tradition.

I was beginning to recognize *myself* in my own.

When I was twelve, my father died.

One of the complicated truths of that time was that grief came alongside another reality: for the first time, my family was able to practice Judaism openly.

We joined a synagogue. I became Bar Mitzvah the following year. And I still remember what it felt like to attend Shabbat services after years of encountering Judaism mostly in private.

Suddenly, the stories I had been reading alone were being sung, prayed, and lived by other people.

No longer was Judaism something I only knew about. It was a community I could enter.

That eventually led me to major in Jewish Studies, then to rabbinical school, and ultimately here, standing before you this morning.

For a long time, I thought of that as the story of how I became a rabbi.

The more I've reflected on it, though, I've come to realize that misses the point.

I think it's really a story about someone making sure that I knew I belonged to a story before I fully understood it.

My mother couldn't give me every answer. She could not know what my Jewish life would eventually look like. But she gave me enough of the story that, when I began asking my own questions, I already knew where I belonged.

And to this day, she remains one of the people who reminds me where I come from and what matters to me.

Long before I could fully understand the tradition she was placing in front of me, she was teaching me how to recognize myself within it.

These are your people.

These are their stories.

And *you* have a place within them.

None of us invents Judaism from scratch. We enter something already underway.

Some of us inherit that story through parents and grandparents. Others come to it through a synagogue, a friend, a spouse, a teacher, or a community. And Jews by choice inherit that story fully when they enter the covenant and make the Jewish people, its stories, and its traditions their own.

The path into the story is not the same for everyone.

But once we are inside it, the responsibility is shared.

Because eventually, every recipient becomes a transmitter.

At first, many of us are in Isaac's position. We encounter a tradition already underway. We learn its stories and practices, become familiar with its rhythms, and eventually know enough to begin asking questions of our own.

And then, almost without noticing, we find ourselves on the other side of that process. We become the ones placing those stories and practices in front of someone else.

We become parents or grandparents, teachers or mentors, rabbis or friends — people whose choices teach someone else what Judaism looks like.

Then the question changes.

Not: what did I inherit?

But: what will someone else inherit from me?

That does not mean the next generation must practice Judaism exactly as we do.

Jewish life has never stood still. Every generation has asked new questions, faced new circumstances, and found new ways to live within an ancient tradition.

The deeper question is whether those who come after us will recognize this story as their own.

Will they hear the stories often enough to find themselves within them?

Will they encounter Judaism as something alive, something worth wrestling with, something that has room for their questions?

Will they understand that being part of the Jewish people does not require having every answer?

Isaac does not have every answer in this morning's reading. But he knows enough to recognize what he does not understand — and to ask.

And perhaps that is part of what makes the scene so enduring.

Jewish continuity does not depend on giving the next generation a tradition so neat and settled that they never need to question it.

It depends on giving them **enough** of the story that they know how to begin asking questions of their own.

Enough language to wrestle.

Enough memory to know where the conversation began.

Enough belonging to understand that the questions are theirs to ask.

That is part of what a synagogue does.

Temple Beth-El exists because generations before us decided that Jewish life in San Antonio was worth building, sustaining, and passing forward.

They built institutions, taught children, gathered for prayer, cared for one another, marked births and deaths and weddings and losses. They argued, adapted, rebuilt, and kept going.

We did not create the story into which we entered here.

And we will not control everything that comes after us.

But for this moment, this generation is holding it.

And that is an extraordinary responsibility.

Not because we have to preserve every detail exactly as it was handed to us.

But because someone coming after us will eventually look at what we have built, recognize that they have inherited something, and begin asking questions of their own:

What is all of this?

Why does it matter?

And what does it have to do with me?

Our answer will not come only from what we say.

It will come from what we choose to sustain, from what we make time for,
and from the stories we tell often enough that they become familiar.

From whether Jewish community feels like a place where questions are
welcomed and belonging is real.

And from whether the next generation sees in us a tradition that is merely
inherited, or one that is lived.

And that brings us back to this day.

Rosh Hashanah is *Yom HaZikaron* — the Day of Remembrance.

We tend to think certain days in our lives matter because of what happened
on them.

A birth.

A death.

A move.

A beginning.

But Rosh Hashanah asks us to think differently.

Maybe this day becomes worth remembering not only because of what happens to us, but because it asks us to remember what has been entrusted to us.

Who helped us understand that we belong?

What stories were placed into our hands?

What part of this tradition have we come to recognize as our own?

And what will someone else know because we chose to carry it forward?

Years ago, my mom gave me an *Illustrated Bible for Jewish Children* and began teaching me *not* to forget who I was.

Neither of us could have known where those nights of reading would eventually lead.

What mattered was that the story reached me.

And she continues to be part of the Jewish story I carry with me now.

That is the work of memory.

Someone holds onto a story long enough to share it.

Someone else hears it long *enough* to recognize themselves within it.

And then, one day, they become the person responsible for telling it again.

So on this Day of Remembrance, may we think of those who placed this story into our hands — those whose memories we carry, and those who continue to teach, challenge, and shape us today.

May we remember that this story belongs to us.

And when someone comes after us and asks, “What does all of this have to do with me?”

May the lives we build, the communities we sustain, and the stories we tell be enough for them to hear the answer:

This story belongs to you, too.