

Elul Reflection

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As we enter the month of Elul, and the world around us has started to transition from summer to fall, I have been reflecting quite a bit on my last 12 months circling the sun. Just a few months ago my grandfather who had been battling Alzheimer's for more than a decade returned to Hashem. I spent much of this year assisting and supporting my grandmother, aunts and uncles, cousins, parents, and siblings as we tried to help my grandfather be comfortable in his last few months. Looking back, my thoughts gravitate to what I learned about family those last few months before his passing.

While helping my father go through what was once the meticulously organized office of an accountant, we found ourselves in what felt like a treasure hunt through my family history. I knew in theory my grandfather had been born into what would become the Great Depression, and then later was drafted into the U.S. Army. It was there he was trained as an accountant and stationed in Japan during the Korean War. I knew very little of his history as it was almost an unspoken rule not to ask about the past. As we delved further into our "treasure hunt" I was able to see how these life experiences shaped him to be the man my father knew and the grandfather I knew. In his desk everything from rubber bands, to binder clips, erasers, and pencils smaller than an average thumb were organized neatly sitting in used *yahrzeit* candles tins and tie boxes from stores that went out of business more than 50 years ago. Hidden behind a stack of boxes, which held every business card I think he ever received, we found a black box. The box had a label taped onto it, which read:

"IN CASE OF ROBBERY:
PLEASE LEAVE THIS TIN BOX- CONTAINS ONLY INSURANCE AND PERSONAL
FAMILY PAPERS
--- ATTENTION CROOKS, INSIDE UNLOCKED--".

This finding had my father and I in fits of laughter. This was something exemplary of his nature, he was always planning, always ten steps ahead. At first, I thought this was just an odd quirky thing that my grandpa would do, but after going through each article, receipt, certificate, and piece of correspondence I was in disbelief. I had gone that day to help my father in his time of need without any expectations of the day, and here I found myself being uplifted and unexpectedly comforted. I finally learned a great deal about that large chunk of family history that I hadn't even realized was missing. I learned that everything I had struggled with, he had, too. Everything I had ever worried or kvetched over, he had, too. It

was at this time I came to what felt like an epiphany. He cared so deeply for me, my sisters, and cousins that he sacrificed relationships with us to try to teach us lessons and values he believed were fundamental for growth and survival on our journey to find happiness. It took some time for me to fully absorb and understand what I learned that day. I was fortunate enough to have the chance to see and speak to him before he passed, and while he wasn't at a place where he could acknowledge my words, we were at peace together.

As I look back on this year and all that has taken place, I feel mentally equipped to go into this period of reflection and then of Teshuva, תשובה (repentance). I am still not quite sure how to forgive what I cannot rationalize or understand, but I accept this as my own personal challenge going into Elul and the High Holidays. Rosh Hashanah is also called Yom HaZikaron, the Day of Remembrance, because God remembers each of us that day. I found that as I was learning about and remembering my grandfather that day, I realized he had remembered me more than I ever knew. He had always thought of my family and what he wanted to pass down to us. I hope in his memory I can honor him by standing beside my family through whatever storms come our way, by living my life in a way that honors my values, and by never squandering opportunities (or materials) I receive. I hope through sharing my thoughts and memories, we as a community can continue to learn and explore healing that comes in all forms of communication. Shabbat Shalom.