

I would like to do something different for a moment so please bear with me. If you are of a Sephardic heritage please stand. If you are named for someone still living, please remain standing. If you truly know the person whose name is attached to your own, remain standing. I would like everyone to look around the room and notice the numbers of those on their feet. Thank you, please be seated. If you are Ashkenazi, please stand. If you know your Hebrew name and for who you are named, remain standing. If you know for who your parents were named, remain standing. Now look around. Please be seated. We are blessed at the Community Synagogue to have a true mixture of Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews. In the Sephardic tradition, children are named for the living and most children are named for their own parents and grandparents, a blessing in itself. In the Ashkenazi tradition, children are named for the dead, so most often; their connection with their ancestor is through photos, letters and oral tradition.

My Hebrew name is *Rivka Batya*. I am named for my maternal and paternal great-grandmothers, Rose and Beatrice. In pictures, these two women look very different. Rose is tall, a strong willed and yet loving presence even on photo paper. In one picture, taken when she is perhaps in her 70's, she stands arm and arm with her husband Paul. They both face the camera. Rose's smile could not be wider. She has dark eyes and dark marceled hair. Her earrings and shoes match her print dress, but her orange crochet bag tells of a rebellious streak. After all, my great-grandmother married Max Morris against her parents' wishes and was forced to divorce him after three years, one child, and a great financial payoff. No one ever spoke of him again- not even in whispers. Interestingly enough, her second husband Paul was an ayd, a witness on her first marriage certificate. My mother remembers that Nana Rose always had sugar cookies cooling when any of the grandchildren came to visit. Her family was her life- her grandchildren her joy. The twinkle in Rose's eye in every picture reminds me that we share the same sense of mischief.

Beatrice Goldberg, my paternal great-grandmother also looks straight at the camera, her cat eye glasses stand out against a strong face with a hint of a smile. The photo from The Boston Herald dated Friday, January 5, 1962 accompanies an article that explains how Beatrice and Jacob, my father's grandparents, celebrated their 50th anniversary with

\$50,000 donated to several charities. Values passed on through the generations. Beatrice was elegant. She ran a tight home in Brookline, Massachusetts as well as a Cape Cod Mansion at Bourne. She loved to entertain, both family and friends as long as she was the hostess. My father remembers that every Friday night was Shabbat dinner at his grandparents' home. All the children and grandchildren were expected at the table; needless to say, the Jewish holidays were even more important. My father says that I received my cooking ability from Beatrice who overcooked everything. Education was important to her. Family was important.

These strong women, my great-grandmothers were very influential in my parent's lives and yet, I, their namesake, know them only as one dimensional paper dolls.

What of my parent's Hebrew names: Natan and Sarah: Who is left to speak for Shana and Nathan who left their names and their values as an inheritance? Who is left to speak for the Zangwills, Flaxs and Cohens murdered during the Shoah? Who is left to speak for the Nagels and Krugmans who stayed behind in Bialystock and Austria? Who is left to speak for the Goldbergs and the Abrams, the Wernicks, and the Edelmans who were trampled under the Cossacks boots? Who were these people? What were their dreams and desires? What was everyday like for them? Their blood runs through my veins- our veins; their genes are why I have this chin and this color hair. Why my babies are blonde and blue-eyed. And yet their names are lost to history.

What is a name? Elie Weisel teaches that a name is a "mask for some, a vantage point, a reminder for others. Sometimes it signifies danger, often support." For the psychologist Paul Valery, nothing is as alien to a human as his or her own name. And this is understandably so. Imposed by parents, the name dominates the person and invades him or her, taking the person's place. Yet, in Jewish tradition, a name evokes a deep and respectful attitude- it is a connector between the present and the past. We are Semites because we are descendants of Shem, one of Noah's sons. We call God, the nameless, HaShem, the name. In other words, our relationship with naming has a mystical nature. Its roots go deep into the mystery of the past.

At the time of our first exile, when we were slaves in Egypt, holding on to our names brought us salvation. We are taught in the Talmud that the children of Israel were redeemed from Egypt because of four meritorious acts: they did not change their names, they did not change their language, they did not reveal their secrets, they did not abandon circumcision. Three thousand years later, we merit redemption for the same acts.

In Judaism, a name has its own history and its own memory. It connects beings with their origins. To retrace its path is to embark on an adventure in which the destiny of a certain name unites past and present. Each name is a mysterious call transmitted from generation to generation to generation in order to force them selves to question the meaning of survival.

In the Torah, we read again and again, Eleh Toldot- these are the generations, followed by verse upon verse of names and to whom they are connected. Usually in Shabbat morning Torah study we skip these sections because they lengthy and do not offer much for discussion, except a laugh over some of the names. Genesis 11, verse 10- these are the generations of Shem, Shem was one hundred years old and begot Arphaschad and sons and daughters, And Arppachshad begot Shelah and Shelah begot Eber, and Eber begot Peleg and Peleg begot Rue. I can honestly say that I have never done a baby naming for a Peleg or an Arphaschad- but their names remain highlighted in Torah. It's as if God is reminding us that every soul, each generation has something to offer the next. We, their inheritors, stand on their shoulders. And every time we read their names, we acknowledge that they helped to create us as we are.

Each week, I eagerly await the New York Times book review. It is the first section that I read after Shabbat services, while the twins are napping. On September 22, 2006, I read the review of *The Lost: A Search for Six of the Six Million Souls* by Daniel Mendelshon. Although I don't usually shop on Shabbat, something in Ron Rosenbaum's review spoke to me and within ten minutes Bailey and I were on our way to Barnes and Nobels. I purchased the 516 page book and read it voraciously. I took it with me wherever I went, afraid to leave it behind lest it should somehow disappear. And although it was six months after I had read it the second time, I put it under the seat of

the car as we made our way on our summer vacation to Nantucket. All who would read it there, had already, but I needed it as a talisman. So what was so captivating about the words penned by Daniel Mendelsohn? Why did the book speak to me? In the words of Charles Simic, "It is sobering to realize that one little story can keep someone living on it a descendant's memory.

Eleh Toldot: these are the generations.

Daniel Mendelsohn writes about the *Shoah* but in a different way than any other author. As Rosenbaum wrote in the review, "The Holocaust is so huge and vast that it becomes easy to think of it in an abstract way. Something mechanical, anonymous. But everything that happened, happened because someone made a decision. To pull a trigger, to flip a switch, to hide, to betray." In *The Lost*, Daniel Mendelsohn becomes one of the players in a drama that began and ended over 60 years ago. When Daniel was a child, the entire Mendelsohn family would gather in Florida, most of them survivors of the massacred Jewish community of Bolechow, Poland. Bolechow had 99.2% of its Jews slaughtered in the Shoah. Of the 6000 Jews in the town, only 48 survived. Mendelsohn writes, "it would occasionally happened that I would walk into a room and certain people would begin to cry." They would cry because of the uncanny resemblance between this child and his great-uncle Shmiel Jager, a meat shipper in Bolechow who was murdered by the Nazis along with his wife Esther and their four daughters.

Mendelsohn's initial quest to find out what happened to Shmiel and his family- the details of their fate during the Shoah- begins with a normal interest in genealogy. But when he finds a series of increasingly desperate letters from Shmiel to his family in America, written in 1939 as Hitler and his men move closer to Bolechow, he is drawn into an obsessive multi-continent search that recreates the events of *The Lost* and their attempted annihilation.

The fact that the search begins with a physical resemblance to one of the lost suggest that an important aspect of the obsession is self identity- his face in the face of the lost. Daniel goes in search of his roots and finds a family much like every Jewish family who perished in the Shoah. Our families. Our loss. Ourselves.

We learn through his journey that Shmiel was a big man in Bolechow- ran the local butcher's cartel. He immigrated to New York City in 1913 but decided that he missed home. He had the first telephone in Bolechow and the first radio. He loved his wife and daughters. Shmiel tried to get back to New York in 1939; but his family across the sea assured him he would be fine. We learn that those townspeople alive in 2002 remembered him and his family, his wife's beautiful legs, how his eldest daughter Frydka was in love with a polish boy. And yet, although they recalled the family, and knew their fate- only one, only one- tried to save the family. In the end, Daniel Mendelsohn was able to take pieces of a puzzle and recreate the life of this family. They became living breathing people again. And with their murder, the reader becomes the lost one. And deeply mourns their deaths.

After finishing the book, my brother-in-law had the same reaction as my mother and myself. Fly to Poland- to the small towns where our ancestors lived, walk the streets, visit their graves. Use the computer to research birth, marriage and death certificates. Find the lost and trace our way back to Sinai.

Eleh Toldot: these are the generations. Judaism is truly about collective and individual memory. Torah tells us that we all stood at Sinai, those who were and those yet to be. We all heard the silence and the thunder and the voice of God. We all received the Torah at the same time in the same place but with our differing capacities for comprehension. We take that same Torah and pass it to our children as they enter the covenant and become Bar or Bat Mitzvah. And they too, take their part in the chain of our tradition.

We remember the rituals of our ancestors through each and every Hag. Dwelling as they did in the Sukkah, rededicating the Temple for Hannukah, commemorating our salvation from slavery at Pesach, recalling how we defeated Haman at Purim, bringing the bikkurim, the first fruits at Shavuot.

We remember the tragedies in our history: Tisha Ba'av, Yom HaShoah, Yom Ha'Zikaron- We remember so that we will never forget.

We remember our individual losses through lighting the Yartzeit candle, reciting names at shul, saying Kaddish. We remember through Yizkor, the special service of

memory. We remember through stones on the grave. We remember through the names we give our babies. As Jews, we are obsessed with memory.

We remember because memory is all that we truly own in life. The philosopher Soren Kirkegaard explained that life can only be understood backwards but it must be lived forwards. Through uncovering the past, we learn more about our future.

In Israel, there is a law that one needs to dig down before he can built up. This law arises from the rich historical past of every inch of the land. The palace that you want to erect for the present and the future may be hiding deeper archeological treasures of the past. One family in the Old City of Jerusalem found that their home was built on an ancient Roman mikveh. Instead of luggage and old furniture in their basement, they have an excavation and tourists plumbing their joint past.

Eleh Toldot: these are our generations.

Every single soul is born with a history already intact. A history created by people who suffered, who celebrated, who loved, who lost. It is up to each soul in a lifetime to discover their past. For in excavating the past, we learn more about ourselves.

The Castle, by Isaac Batshevitz Singer:

Menashe was an orphan. He lived with his uncle Mendel, who was a poor man who couldn't even manage to feed and clothe his own children. Menashe had always been a curious child. He had begun to ask questions as soon as he could talk. How high is the sky? How deep is the earth? What is beyond the edge of the world? Why are people born? Why do they die?

It was a hot and humid summer day. Menashe quarreled with his Aunt Dvosha and left the house without eating lunch. He was 12, with black eyes and sunken cheeks.

The village in which he lived stood in a forest that surrounded it like a sash and was said to stretch as far as Lublin. It was blueberry time, and here and there one might also find wild strawberries. Menashe made his way through pastures and wheat fields. He was hungry, and he tore off a stalk of wheat to chew on the grain.

Once Menashe entered the forest, it was cooler. The pine trees stood straight as pillars, and on their brownish bark hung golden necklaces, the light of the sun shining

through the pine needles. The sounds of cuckoo and woodpecker were heard, and an unseen bird kept repeating the same eerie screech. . . Menashe stepped carefully over moss pillows. The forest was still, and yet full of voices and echoes.

He wandered deeper and deeper into the forest...He was hungry, his head ached, and his knees felt weak. Am I getting sick, he thought. Maybe I'm going to die. Then I will soon be with Daddy and Mama. When he came to a blueberry patch, he sat down, picked one berry after another, and popped them into his mouth. But they did not satisfy his hunger. Flowers with intoxicating odors grew among the blueberries. Without realizing it, Menashe stretched full length on the forest floor. He fell asleep, but in his dream he continued walking.

The trees became even taller, the smells stronger, huge birds flew from branch to branch. The sun was setting. The forest grew thinner, and he soon came out on a plain with a broad view of the evening sky. Suddenly a castle appeared in the twilight. Menashe had never seen such a beautiful structure. Its roof was of silver and from it rose a crystal tower. Its many tall windows were as high as the building itself. Menashe went up to one of the windows and looked in. On the wall opposite him, he saw his own portrait hanging. He was dressed in luxurious clothes such as he had never owned. The huge room was empty.

Then doors opened where there had been none before, and men and women came into the room. They were dressed in white satin and the women wore jewels and held holiday prayer books with gold-embossed covers. Menashe gazed in astonishment. He recognized some of these people. " *tateh, mameh, bobeh, zaydeh*. His father, his mother, his grandfathers and grandmothers, and other relatives as well. He wanted to rush over to them, hug them and kiss them, but the window glass stood in his way. He began to cry.

His paternal grandfather, Tobias the scribe, separated himself from the group and came to the window. The old man's beard was as white as his long coat. He looked both ancient and young. "Why are you crying?" he asked.

"Are you my Grandfather Tobias?"

"Yes, my child. I am your grandfather."

"Who does this castle belong to?"

"To all of us."

"To me, too?"

"Of course. To the whole family."

"Grandpa, let me in," Menashe said. "I want to speak to my father and mother."

His grandfather looked at him lovingly and said, "One day you will live with us here, but the time has not yet come."

"How long do I have to wait?"

"That is a secret. It will not be for many, many years."

"Grandpa, I don't want to wait so long. I'm hungry and thirsty and tired. Please let me in. I miss my father and mother and you and Grandma. I don't want to be an orphan."

"My dear child. We know how you feel. We think about you and we love you. We are all waiting for the time when we will be together, but you must be patient. You have a long journey to take before you come here to stay."

"Please, just let me in for a few minutes."

Grandfather Tobias left the window and took counsel with other members of the family. When he returned, he said, "You may come in, but only for a little while. We will show you around the castle and let you see some of our treasures, but then you must leave."

A door opened and Menashe stepped inside. He was no sooner over the threshold than his hunger and weariness vanished. He embraced his parents, and they kissed and hugged him. But they didn't utter a word. He felt strangely light. He floated along, and his family floated with him. His grandfather opened door after door and each time Menashe's astonishment grew.

One room was filled with racks of clothing - pants, jackets, shirts, coats. Menashe realized that some of these were his, from the time he was a young boy...

. . . .A second door opened and he saw toys, among them those he had owned: the tin soldiers his father had bought him; the jumping clown his mother had brought back from Lublin; the whistles and harmonicas; the teddy bear Grandpa had given him one

Purim...The notebooks in which he had practiced writing, his pencils and Bible lay on a table.

A third door opened. Menashe entered a room with no one in it, yet it was full of the sounds of happy talk, song and laughter. Menashe heard his own voice and the songs he used to sing when he lived at home with his parents. He also heard the voices of his grandparents and although he did not recognize them yet, the voices of his grandchildren.

The fourth door led to a large hall. It was filled with all the stories his parents had told him at bedtime. . . warriors and princesses, and people he thought were characters in books: Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

Behind the fifth door, Menashe glimpsed men and women, animals and many things that were completely strange to him. The images were not as vivid as they had been in the other rooms. The figures were transparent and surrounded by mist. On the threshold stood a girl Menashe's own age. She had long golden braids. Although Menashe could not see her clearly, he liked her at once. For the first time he turned to his grandfather. "What is all this?" he asked. And his grandfather replied, "These are the people and events of your future and your past."

"Where am I?" Menashe asked.

"You are in a castle that has many names. We like to call it the place where nothing is lost. There are many more wonders here, but now it is time for you to leave."

Menashe wanted to remain in this strange place forever, together with his parents and grandparents. He looked questioningly at his grandfather, who shook his head. . . His parents silently bade him farewell, and his face became wet and hot from their kisses. At that moment everything disappeared .

Menashe shivered and awoke. It was night in the forest. Dew was falling. High above the crowns of the pine trees the full moon shone and the stars twinkled. Menashe looked into the face of a girl who was bending over him. She was barefoot and wore a patched skirt. Her long, braided hair shone gold in the moonlight. She was shaking him and saying, "Get up, get up. It is late, and you can't stay here in the forest."

Menashe sat up. "Who are you?"

"I was looking for berries and I found you here. I've been trying to wake you."

"What's your name?"

"Channeleh. We moved into the village last week."

She looked familiar, but he could not remember meeting her before. Suddenly he knew.

"I did have a dream."

"What about?"

"A castle."

"What kind of castle?"

Menashe did not reply, and the girl did not repeat her question. She stretched out her hand to him and helped him get up. Together they started for home. The moon had never seemed so light or the stars so close. They walked with shadows behind them.

. . . Among the undergrowth and wild mushrooms, little people in red jackets, gold caps, and green boots emerged. They danced in a circle and sang a song that is heard only by those who know that everything lives, and nothing in time can ever be lost.

May we each be blessed to find our glorious castle, where past and present dance in holiness. May we remember to remember that nothing and no one is ever lost. And that someday we too will join the long list of our ancestors, serving as namesakes for future newborn souls. What will they know about us? What will we leave for them to discover?