

**Wound and Healing  
Remembering and Forgetting**

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When in 1977, at the age of 15, I presented my newfound faith in Yeshu'a to my Jewish parents, they expressed their dismay in one penetrating question: "How can you join them after what they did to us?" For my parents (and many Jews), those who believe in Yeshu'a are responsible for much of Jewish suffering over the centuries – the Crusades, the Inquisition, blood libels, pogroms, marginalization, discrimination and persecution, culminating in the Shoah. I was at first bewildered by their question as I had spoken to them about Yeshu'a and they were speaking about the behavior of his supposed disciples. However, I made a promise to them that I would do nothing to formally join the Church for a period of ten years during which we could discern together whether this was indeed my way. I encountered Yeshu'a in 1977 but was not baptized until 1988.

I had encountered Yeshu'a in the radiant joy of a Russian Orthodox nun who bore authentic witness to the Resurrection. I was immediately swept up into the incredibly beautiful liturgy of the Byzantine Church. However, I was baptized eleven years later as a Roman Catholic. The shift was largely due to trying to deal with my parents' question. "How could I join them after what they had done to us?" The response of my spiritual parents in the Orthodox Church was: "The world is a bad place, stay inside the Church". I was not satisfied with the answer as even then I could see there was much darkness inside the Church and undeniable good in the world outside. One of the witnesses to Yeshu'a that drew me to the Catholic Church was Pope John XXIII and in particular his readiness to ask profoundly disturbing historical questions. This would lead to the great revolution of *Nostra Aetate*, a new relationship with the Jewish people and the duty to remember what had been done so that it would never be repeated. This was later taken up into the Church declaration that remembered the Shoah "We remember" in the following words: "*It is not only a question of recalling the past. The common future of Jews and Christians demands that we remember, for "there is no future without memory". History itself is memoria futuri.*" As Pope John Paul II wrote in his Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, "*It is appropriate that, as the Second Millennium of Christianity draws to a close, the Church should become more fully conscious of the sinfulness of her children, **recalling** all those times in history when they departed from the spirit of Christ and his Gospel and, instead of offering to the world the witness of a life inspired by the values of faith, indulged in ways of thinking and acting which were truly forms of counter-witness and scandal.*"

I have struggled with what remembering means over the years as I not only settled into the Roman Catholic Church as a Jew but also migrated from where Jews had been a marginal, powerless minority in the Diaspora to where they are a dominant and powerful majority in the State of Israel. What does it mean to remember as a Jewish disciple of Yeshu'a in a Church that is overwhelmingly Gentile and what does it mean to remember as a Jew in an overwhelmingly Jewish state. These dilemmas intersect and crisscross for me as Jew and Israeli, as Catholic priest and concerned member of humanity. I will suggest that there are two very different kinds of remembering that can be understood through Scripture, one positive, a remembering that opens the horizons of life, salvation and healing and the other negative, shutting us in a tomb in which festering wounds are fomented. From our critical situation in the margins of both Israel and

Church, we, Jewish believers in Yeshu'a, have a role in helping our people in both communities to discern between these two types of remembering.

As a Catholic, I hear the command to remember every day at the Eucharist. "*The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me"* (1 Corinthians 11:23-25). Remembering orients the disciples towards their relationship with Yeshua. Remembering renders present again what might have slipped away. Once present, forgetfulness is replaced with the intensity of encounter that allows for a new beginning. This act of remembering is profoundly rooted in the experience of Israel at the Exodus. At the very core of the Passover celebration, parents remind their children of what God has done for Israel, obeying the commandment: "*You shall tell your child on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' It shall serve for you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead*" (Exodus 13:8-9). Eucharistic and Passover remembering plays a part in the shaping of the future. Remembering in this positive sense has two basic purposes. One is to give thanks for what is called to mind and the other is to reorient when one has lost direction:

In Scripture, many of the times that there is a commandment to remember, it is connected to the obligation to give thanks – we remember so that we can give thanks and praise God for what He has done for us. Israel is commanded to remember what happened in the past in order to condition behavior in the present and open up the future. The most emblematic is perhaps the command to remember the Shabbat. "*Remember Shabbat, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is Shabbat to the Lord your God... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Shabbat day and consecrated it*" (Exodus 20:8-10.11) or, alternatively: "*Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Shabbat*" (Deuteronomy 5:15). Human memory of the past opens up the horizon of future salvation that God has promised.

Interestingly, more than half the usages of the imperative "remember" in the Old Testament command God to remember God's covenantal obligations and the promises God has made. "*Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever'*" (Exodus 32:13). When it comes to God, remembering is synonymous with His promise of salvation. During the Flood at the time of Noah, "*God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided*" (Genesis 8:1). At the time of the slavery in Egypt: "*God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them*" (Exodus 2:24-25). God's remembrance affirms God's promises and initiates their actualization. Thus, it is clear that there is an intimate link between Israel's remembering and God's remembering, a remembering that focuses upon life, salvation and healing.

Israel's remembering is a condition for remaining within the intimate relationship that God has initiated: "*remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. If you do forget the Lord your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish*" (Deuteronomy 8:18-19). Here, the strong opposition between remembering and forgetting separates salvation from perdition. Therefore, the second purpose of remembering is to reorient oneself when one has forgotten and thus lost direction. In the Scriptures, remembering reorients, beginning with a confession of sin. Psalm 51, David's classic confession, proclaims: "*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me*" (Psalm 51:2-3). David's sin is rendered actual so as to provoke a deep sense of contrition in the sinner, who begs for God's pardon. This is not only in the life of David, but in all those who recite the psalm since it was written. Remembering provokes a reorientation that sets the believer on the right path again.

There is however a kind of remembering that does not open up the horizons. For example, the memory of trauma or crisis can set us back firmly in the tomb. I have spoken with survivors of the Nazi extermination camps. I have worked with women who have been tortured, raped and mutilated in human trafficking camps. I have counseled children who have been severely abused by their parents. The memory of the events can lead to violent accusation and a driving desire for revenge. Is the act of memory in itself a virtue?

Scripture does not always command remembering but also occasionally praises forgetting. There is a seemingly banal forgetting that opens up a gate of salvation: "*When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings*" (Deuteronomy 24:19). This act of forgetting allows the poor to be fed and the forgetter to be blessed. In fact, God is described as forgetting when it comes to the sins we have committed. Isaiah declares: "*You have cast all my sins behind your back*" (Isaiah 38:17) and God responds "*I will not remember your sins*" (Isaiah 43:25). In the text in which Jeremiah describes the New Covenant, God declares: "*I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more*" (Jeremiah 31:34). Here, it is forgetting rather than remembering that opens the horizon of life, salvation and healing. It is in this sense that Saul the Apostle writes: "*Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 3:13-14). It would seem that here too there is a dual purpose in the virtue of forgetting: not to accuse and take vengeance and not to self-justify. How can we discern between the two kinds of remembering?

I think that the key to discernment is the fruit of the act of remembering. To give thanks and to confess one's sins open the horizons. To accuse, take vengeance and justify one's sinfulness closes off the horizon. An important Israeli documentary film entitled "Yizkor" (Eyal Sivan) has been a major reference point for me in dealing with remembering. The film, which includes a long interview with the Israeli religious philosopher Yeshayahu Leibovitz, asks the burning question: Why do we remember? I recommend this film to everyone. It presents the very problematic cult of remembering in the modern State of Israel that binds Passover with Shoah Memorial Day, the Memorial Day for the Fallen in Israel's Wars and Israeli Independence Day.

It reminds the viewer of the problematic nature of remembering when it closes off horizons and is manipulated for purposes of a national unity that is not interested in healing, justice and peace but rather solidifying an image of the presumed enemy and promoting self-justification in all that is said and done.

Within this context, there is another commandment to remember in the Old Testament that renders present an event: *“Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way, when you were faint and weary, and struck down all who lagged behind you; he did not fear God. Therefore, when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies on every hand, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; do not forget”* (Deuteronomy 25:17-19). This is no isolated text as the failure to implement this commandment is the final straw in God’s rejection of Saul (cf. 1Samuel 15), who did not slay Agag, King of the Amalekites, an omission that not only cost him the throne but also led to Haman, a descendant of Agag, threatening the Jewish people centuries later, in the Book of Esther. Purim can then be presented as the celebration that the commandment has finally been accomplished through the work of Esther and Mordechai.

However, through the centuries of Jewish history, Amalek has remained a symbol of the enemies of the Jews. More problematically in the context of Israeli power, Jewish extremists have identified Palestinians with Amalek. On Purim Day (February 25), 1994, Baruch Goldstein shot dead 29 Palestinian Muslims, kneeling in prayer in Hebron’s Tomb of the Patriarchs, affirming that he was acting to implement the commandment to blot out Amalek. Is the intention of the commandment to remember what Amalek did to nurture accusation and vengeance? This would seem to be a very dark side to remembering. However, reading the text carefully (within the context of tradition’s wrestling with its dark side) opens up a meaning that is lost on those locked into an ideological dynamic of accusation, vengeance and self-justification. The commandment is to remember what Amalek did and thus to blot out these actions perhaps most importantly when they have their root in the person remembering. In this sense, the correct place of the remembering of Amalek is in the confession of sin when the sinner remembers what Amalek did. That memory of Amalek’s deeds throws light on the actions of the one remembering. Hassidic Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev (1740-1809) taught along these lines: *“Every individual Jew must blot out that evil part called ‘Amalek’ which is hidden in his heart. As long as the seed of Amalek is in the world, since a person is a miniature world (a microcosm), Amalek exists in the evil potential within the person, which awakens anew again and again to cause him to sin.”*

How can we, as Jewish disciples of Yeshua, help our people to remember in ways that open up the gates of life, salvation and healing? On the one hand, we are provoked to remember Yeshua in a spirit of thanksgiving and confession of sin, especially as we partake with all those from the nations, in His Body. On the other hand, we are called to remember that we are part and parcel of a people that has suffered much at the hands of those who have claimed to be disciples of Yeshua. Between these two memories – the memory of Yeshua and the memory of the sufferings of our people at the hands of those who claimed to follow Yeshua – there is an enormous tension that is essential to our identity. Let us take seriously the challenge of making every act of memory an opening to thanksgiving and asking forgiveness rather than an opening to accusation, vengeance seeking and self-justification.