

Aud Lang Syne

Yizkor 5783

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Should old acquaintance be forgot / And never brought to mind? /
Should old acquaintance be forgot / And auld lang syne. I was reminded of this song so associated with our Secular New year by the Author John Green. He hosts a bimonthly radio show entitled the "Anthropocene Reviewed," pondering the human centered planet, and offers a 1-5 star review at the end.

Green really has a gift for uncovering the midrash, the hidden perspective on something that we thought we knew so well. To invite us to struggle with that newness and uncover the gems we didn't notice before.

I always thought I knew what Auld lang syne meant: the image forever encapsulated in my mind is from "When Harry Met Sally" where they characteristically kibitz about what the song means anyhow. Harry Remarks:

What does this song mean? My whole life, I don't know what this song means. I mean, 'Should old acquaintance be forgot'? Does that mean that we should forget old acquaintances, or does it mean if we happened to forget them, we should remember them, which is not possible because we already forgot?

Sally responds: Well, maybe it just means that we should remember that we forgot them or something. Anyway, it's about old friends.

So, in that simplistic view, I thought of old friends every time I sang the song, and have sorely missed friends over these past years, rarely leaving the four walls of my home. Thinking about it today, makes me nostalgic for the simpler times, when masks were not needed, when the idea of offering someone a hug didn't make me feel anxious or stressed. When I didn't feel so unsure of what the future will hold.

John Green listened carefully to the song, and argued that the song isn't just about old friends, but ensuring that those old friends should not be forgotten, never brought to mind. A song of Yizkor. He drew particular attention to the fourth verse: We two have paddled in the stream, from morning sun till dine, but seas between us broad have roared since Auld Lang Syne." Green goes on to note: "And I think about the many broad seas that have roared between me and the past--seas of neglect, seas of time, seas of death. I'll never speak again to many of the people who loved me into this moment, just as you will never speak to many of the people who loved you into your now."

Yizkor is our regular opportunity to draw into our hearts those people who have loved us into our "now" that we will never have a

conversation with again. Relationships severed, relationships that we want to never forget.

The gift of Green's telling of this story, is that it is both the specific exploration of Auld Lang Syne, a song that has centuries of history and has evolved along with us, and is the story of one of his relationships, the one with Amy Krouse Rosenthal. A few minutes into his exploration he tells us: "She is dead. The rare present tense sentence that, once it becomes true, stays true forever."

Listening to Green's reflections on Amy made me wish she was a part of my life too. By sharing her story, he ensured that she too would be remembered. Her words still haunt me, from her book where she said: "If one is generously contracted 80 years, that amounts to 29,220 days on Earth. Playing that out, how many times then, really, do I get to look at a tree? 12,395? There has to be an exact number. Let's just say it is 12,395. Absolutely, that is a lot, but it is not infinite, and anything less than infinite seems too measly a number and is not satisfactory."

Green notes: In her writing, Amy often sought to reconcile the infinite nature of consciousness and love and yearning with the finite nature of the universe and all that inhabits it. Towards the end of Textbook, one of her books, she wrote a multiple choice question: 'In the alley, there is a bright pink flower peeking out through the asphalt. A. It looks like futility. B. It looks like hope.' Anyway, for me

at least, “green Concludes” Auld Lang Syne captures exactly what it feels like to see a bright pink flower peeking out through the asphalt, and how it feels to know you have 12,395 times to look at a tree.”

Yizkor is the imperative to remember. To remember the conversations we used to have. To remember the way they made us feel, when we were together. To remember the moments we stood together and admired the beauty of the world. To remember the lessons they taught us. To remember to tell the stories of those relationships. And to remember to share their stories with those we love. As we remember, may we retell the tales of those people who have loved us into this moment, and in so doing, love others into their moment.