

And We are the Link
Yizkor Sermonette for Beth-El, Fort Worth
Rabbi Ralph Mecklenburger
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Thanks to my curiosity, and your generosity in providing me with study leaves in the summer, for many years now I have been reading current neuroscience and cognitive studies, and researching theology, as well. As I read more and more of this material over the years, it slowly dawned on me that the field could also offer important insights into religion and why we believe what we believe.

All that is background first for saying, a bit self-indulgently, I suppose, but you'll soon see where I am going with this, that after plugging away, chapter by chapter, for years, I finished a book, now titled *Our Religious Brains*, and sent it off to a publisher. There followed an extended courtship dance, and finally, about eight months later, they accepted the book! I was thrilled.

What goes through the mind at such a moment? That I needed to tell my wife, Ann, of course, and my friend and mentor who had been encouraging this effort for years, Rabbi and Jewish Philosophy Professor Neil Gillman of the Jewish Theological Seminary. I also contacted Howard Kelfer and others who helped and encouraged.

But that is only what I expected to do. The thought that caught me by surprise was this: I really wanted to call my mother. And my father, too. Only they have been gone for quite a few years now. Those of you who have lost a parent, or spouse, or a grandparent you were close to, can, I suspect, relate. There are moments when you just want to reach for the phone and share something special with them. But you can't.

The sacred order of life, though, a vital aspect of which is *mishpachah*, family, has its compensations. There are *other* family members to share things with, my brothers, for instance, and long time friends who are "almost family." And if one is so blessed, as I am, you can tell your children.

There truly is a chain of family love and tradition which binds us together across the generations. When you miss the previous generation, give a hug to the next--whether in person or a virtual hug via telephone or computer. Not only the genes, but often the values and commitments of those who came before us live on in and through us. We have all caught ourselves speaking our parents' words (sometimes even saying things we swore we never would!). If you listen and watch closely, you can catch glimpses of those who are gone in those who follow. Every once in a while one of my kids says or does something that my or Ann's parents—or our grandparents whom they cannot even remember—would have said or done in like situation.

We see, at such a moment, if we are alert to it, that immortality does not necessarily

require that we live on in some other realm after exiting this world (no one knows!). The chain of love and tradition stretches back farther than we can see, and—God willing—stretches into the future for generations to come. There is a link between yesterday's generations and tomorrow's. We, each of us, all of us, are that link. What a privilege! What a blessing! Amen.