

EULOGY FOR LUDWIG JESSELSON

There were no eulogies spoken at Luddy Jesselson's funeral, because it was the eve of Passover when Jewish law forbids excessive mourning and therefore prohibits eulogies; hence this memorial meeting assumes double importance, and the moving tributes we have heard this afternoon are all the more meaningful.

Yet, despite the absence of formal tribute at that time, there were eulogies offered for him. As I walked with and through the throngs that came to honor him, from Presidents and Prime Ministers and professors and communal leaders to the most ordinary of ordinary folk, I heard comments that came from the heart, with an eloquent simplicity born of honesty and pure respect and gratitude for this unusual, historic personality. In effect, therefore, there must have been several hundred private eulogies--all of them sincere, heartfelt, and heart-warming. This formal event is in the nature of a public confirmation--a collective "amen"--to those spoken that dark day in Tel Aviv, and in the homes and hearts of thousands of individuals around the globe.

And all these tributes were and are offered not because Luddy needed them for his reputation to be secured, but because we need them to satisfy our own need to be humbly grateful to a humble and great man.

I got to know Luddy and Erica best when I came to Yeshiva University as President over 16 years ago, and found Luddy as a Trustee and later Chairman of the Board, and Erica as an indefatigable leader of our Museum and an advisor on most other aspects of university life. But I remember them when they were first courting--I was a youngster then. How impressive Luddy was! He was a conservatively dressed but dashing young man, with a diamond tie pin in his perfectly tied tie, the same kind of up-turned brim on his hat that he always favored, a benign but highly intelligent smile on his face, and speaking convincingly and brightly and with good humor on almost any topic. These characteristics hardly changed in the course of the decades.

And how very much he accomplished during these decades! We all knew that he had a great effect upon his times and his fellow humans. But few of us appreciated, during his lifetime, just how vast was the influence he exercised on both society and individuals. Ludwig Jesselson was not just a "donor." He threw himself into his philanthropic activity as if it were his very own business project, and he gave it all his attention, talent, and passion for achievement.

A measure of the impact he made upon diverse groups and all kinds of people is the outpouring of grief and reverence for him as indicated by the extraordinary number of obituaries in the N.Y. Times--between 90-100--and the many more that appeared in other newspapers in the USA, English and foreign language, and in Israel, and which extended to 12-13 days! I suspect this established a record of no little importance.

But what of the man behind the public persona, the inner man?

Just hours before the beginning of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln called upon leaders of the North and South to display "the better angels of our nature."

When I think of Luddy Jesselson, my mind conjures up just such a scene-- Luddy accompanied by the better, the best, angels of our nature, who represented a collection that was the best in all of us. For indeed, he was blessed with some of the finest characteristics granted to us fallible, imperfect humans. I do not mean to say that he was an angel--Luddy himself would not only deny that, but he would either mock or resent any such gross exaggerations--but there were traits that he possessed which took our most human virtues and weaved them expertly into the fabric of his personality.

As a great trader, he had to be tough, wily, smart, and often impatient. Yet, he was fundamentally a gracious man, thoughtful, continental in manner and style, sensitive to the needs and fears and loves of others. Luddy Jesselson was also a teacher and mentor to countless young people in the trading business, so many of whom owe their success to him. He was a teacher and role model as well to budding and even veteran philanthropists, to community leaders, and to ordinary people, Jews and non-Jews alike.

He was, equally, a cultured gentleman: He was largely an autodidact, self-educated--and what better teacher could he have? He acquired on his own an extensive knowledge of old books and manuscripts, he support archeological digs, he studied history, knew well and built and supported museums and specialized libraries. Indeed, he and Erica were the major personalities in improving the Judaica collection in our university libraries as well as those of other institutions.

Despite the many millions he gave away in charity, Luddy never lost his personal modesty. Luddy and Erica almost never had their names attached to any project or gift. In Yeshiva, his name appears only on a chair in economics--and that was given by his associates in his honor, but not by himself.

Above all, he was a devoted and loving *pater familias* who imbued his vigorous and talented family with his values, his



principles, his ideals. And he was a remarkable husband to Erica, as she was a remarkable wife to him; they were not just spouses, they were *partners* in every aspect and activity of their life together.

The renowned French philosopher, Jacques Maritain, once said, "The tone of this era has been set by people with weak heads and sensitive hearts, or people with powerful heads and hard hearts, whereas few people unite a sensitive heart with a powerful head." True indeed, and Ludwig Jesselson was one of that precious and redeeming minority--for he was blessed by his Creator with a powerful head and a good, capacious, sensitive heart!

Luddy not only possessed a powerful head, but he was generally a strong personality, a no-nonsense man not given to pandering to his own emotions. How proud he would have been of the way his family observed the Seder the very night after the funeral, in dedication to his *gestalt* which hovered in the atmosphere that unforgettable evening. The family restrained their grief in honor of the festival--and in *his* honor. They were, and are, brave troopers--all of them: wife and children and their wives, sister-in-law, and grandchildren. How he would have approved of their heroic efforts to keep their tears in check and join the grandchildren in their expert recitation of the Hagadah and its traditional songs. It was a genuine tribute to him.

His *Weltanschauung* largely followed that of Rabbi S.R. Hirsch in his cultural breadth (*Torah U-Madda* or *Torah Im Derek Eretz*), that of the integration of sacred and profane studied; but he did not accept his communal policies of *Austritt* or exclusivism. Instead, in this he followed the great Rabbis Hoffman and Nobel of Frankfurt-am-Main who refused to separate themselves from the general Jewish community despite profound religious differences with them.

His liberal outlook, however, by no means affected his personal piety. He traveled all over the world, in the most remote and inaccessible places (last year it was the South Pole, and he planned next year to be in the North Pole), because he was inquisitive, intellectually curious, and loved people in their very diversity. Yet all through this (even joining a band of hunters in order to find a mine which was important for his business), he always wore his *arba kanfot* under his shirt and took along his *tallit u-tefillin* and, even more, his neatly and tightly packed *havdalah* set. He was especially observant of *kiddush levanah*--the sanctification of the New Moon, which he learned from his father. Luddy did not pretend to Judaic scholarship, but he was an informed Jewish layman and an utterly genuine and authentic Jew in observing what was incumbent on him. How many laymen, especially eminently successful ones, can lay claim to such genuine and unassuming *yirat shamayim*, piety?

His love for Israel was unbounded. He was a leader of UJA, to which he was one of New York's most generous contributors. He gave lavishly to Israeli charities of all kinds. He was personally involved: He and Erica acquired a beautiful apartment in Jerusalem where they spent most of the Jewish holidays. And--he was interred in Israel, alongside his beloved parents, whom he rescued from the Dachau concentration camp.

Luddy used to love to pray at the *Kotel*, the wall of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, the very Wall from which (according to the Talmud) the Presence of God never departs. Indeed, the evening before he died--he was praying at the Wall. For a man his age to walk back to his hotel was no mean achievement, but for him it meant nothing.

One Yom Kippur, I was privileged to be in Jerusalem, and he invited me to join him for the closing *Ne'ilah* prayers at the Wall. It was a scene I shall always cherish: his patent devoutness, the family members and many friends all joining him in the holiest prayers of the year at the holiest place in the world--and the joy and relief as we all went back together. It was another dimension of Luddy's personality that fit in neatly with the other facets of this special man. We shall miss him especially on that sacred day. Indeed, I suspect the *Kotel* itself will miss Luddy Jesselson for *Ne'ilah* on Yom Kippur...

Luddy expired on a special day of the Jewish calendar--the Sabbath before Passover, a day known as *Shabbat ha-Gadol*, "the Great Sabbath." Various reasons are given for this honorific term--and all of them are somehow relevant to him.

One reason is: *שבת שהגדול דורש בו*, the Shabbat on which the *gadol*, the most eminent personage of the community, usually the Rabbi, *doresh*, preaches or lectures.

Well, Luddy was not a rabbi and he did not lecture or preach. But Luddy Jesselson most certainly was a *גדול*! What a fitting epithet: Luddy the *גדול*, the Great!... Not as a preacher or speaker, but as one who challenges, for *doresh* means not only "lectures" but also "demands." His very life and work stand as a rebuke to all who did not live up to his standards, whether of charity or morality or integrity.

What does the memory of a Luddy Jesselson demand of us; what does this *gadol doresh*?

\*1. That we give priority in our private lives to principles, not only prudence;

\*2. That we conduct our business dealings with integrity; that our word be kept under all circumstances and no matter how adversely it affects us;



\*3. That we be loyal to our faith, to our Torah, to our people;

\*4. That we be tolerant of those of other convictions and not seek to impose our own perceptions upon them.

There is a second reason for the name *Shabbat ha-gadol*: it is so called because of a **נס גדול**, a "Great Miracle," that occurred in Biblical times, on that very day before the Exodus itself. The Israelites defied regnant Egyptian idolatry, animal-worship, by tying a lamb to each bed-post on this day preparatory to their exodus, thus publicly demonstrating their faith in One God and their denial of paganism. This is a great miracle--as opposed to the divine splitting of waters of Red Sea which was, so to speak, an ordinary miracle... Why? Because when people manifest courage on behalf of a noble ideal, when they implement it with heroism, with defiance of the oppressor, that is a miracle; more, it is a human and therefore a great miracle, a **נס גדול**.

Luddy appreciated such "great miracles." That is why he supported most generously such scientific and medical institutions in which courage and daring are matched by sensitivity and compassion. That is why Shaarei Zedek Hospital, which earned the sobriquet "the hospital with a heart," attracted his interest, his support, and his leadership. For what they do--and what other such scientific institutions accomplish--belongs in the category of human, and therefore great, miracles. And he performed miracles for them when they were in desperate straits.

There is a third and final reason for the epithet *Shabbat ha-Gadol*, and that is because the **Haftorah** read on that day comes from the prophet Malachi, who concludes his stormy but consoling prophecy with the verses: .

הנה אנכי שולח לכם את אליהו הנביא לפני בוא יום ה'  
גדול והנורא: והשיב לב אבות על בנים ולב בנים על אבותם

The "great" day is the one when the Prophet Elijah will reappear and usher in the age of redemption. And what will be the sign of that redemption on the **יום הגדול**, "the Great Day?" It will be one of the reconciliation of the generations, when parents and children will mutually affirm the same sacred principles, when "generation gaps" will vanish, when the sacred traditions of the past will be studied, examined, continued, and enriched instead of being cast aside as irrelevant because of our ignorance and indifference.

Such a reconciliation and return to the most enduring and cherished values of Jewish civilization and faith have, as their prerequisite, Jewish education. The Great Day is one in which knowledge and learning and sophistication will bring fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, back to each other--and back to Torah and to God.

That is why Luddy Jesselson lent so much support to Jewish education--to SAR in Riverdale, to a whole host of other institutions, to Bar Ilan University, especially its advanced Torah divisions. And, of course, heading the list is Yeshiva University. He was for 32 years a Trustee of the University, and for the last 4 years Chairman of the Board of Trustees. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from Yeshiva. When we were in danger some 14-15 years ago, he was a true redeemer for us. He and especially Erica were the ones who conceived, endowed, directed, and helped our YU Museum. Their interests extended to major contributions of rare manuscripts, including Americana, to our library. Most recently, Luddy undertook a major interest in providing fellowships and scholarships for the most outstanding, superior applicants to our various schools. Moreover, he consciously identified with our mission of Torah Umadda, and earnestly believed in what we are trying to accomplish. He was deeply respected by all his colleagues, the faculty, and the students. We shall miss him more than words can say.

Permit me a few words directly to Erica and the children: you, and all of us who were close to him, have not--and refuse to--reconcile ourselves to the loss of this giant, this "Luddy ha-Gadol." We are still dumbfounded: how can it be that he is gone?! I am reminded of the lines of Edna St. Vincent Millay --

DOWN, DOWN, DOWN INTO THE DARKNESS OF THE GRAVE.  
GENTLY THEY GO, THE BEAUTIFUL, THE TENDER, THE KIND;  
QUIETLY THEY GO, THE INTELLIGENT, THE WITTY, THE BRAVE.  
I KNOW. BUT I DO NOT APPROVE. AND I AM NOT RESIGNED.

No, we are not resigned, certainly not yet, to this massive landmark on the human landscape of our times. And we certainly do not "approve."

But for whatever this consolation is worth to the family, let me conclude by sharing with you an insight by the late Nobel Laureate of Israel, Sh. Y. Agnon. Agnon offers the following original interpretation of the Kaddish recited by the children of the deceased for 11 months after the death of a parent.

The Kaddish begins with the words, **יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּה**, "May His great Name be glorified and sanctified." What does this doxology, this paen of praise to the Creator of the world, have to do with the death of a loved one? It is a question often asked, and there are not too many adequate



answers. The following solution is offered by Agnon and, even if it is more poetic than historically accurate, there is a great and powerful truth enfolded in it:

An ordinary, mortal king who wages war, sends in his troops to the front line. If some fall, he replenishes them with new recruits. He may regret the loss of life, but he cannot afford to be too sentimental about individuals if he is to win his war; the soldiers remain so much cannon fodder.

Not so the divine King, who is also a Father to every single one of his human children. When one of the "soldiers" of the **מלך מלכי המלכים**, the "King of Kings," passes away, God considers that two things have occurred: first, that His Name has been *diminished*, for a unique and irreplaceable human has been lost. Second, His holiness has been compromised, His Name has been *deseccrated*; it is a **חלול השם**. And so, God--as it were--is in mourning for His lost child, suffering both diminution and desecration.

The Kaddish is therefore *our human means of consoling the Almighty, of healing His injured spirit!* Our words of consolation are: May His sublime Name which has suffered shrinkage and attenuation **יתגדל**, may it be made great once again, may His Name be made whole again. And for the desecration of His Name, the blasphemy that death is--**ויתקדש**, let that Name of God be sanctified and cleansed and purified once again: **קדוש השם** overcome by **חלול השם**.

So, much as we rail against the loss of our Great Luddy, let us console God for He too, as it were, is grieving, He has lost one of His most effective ambassadors on earth, and therefore He too mourns for Luddy.

Our prayer is that just as you in your Kaddish console our Father in Heaven, so will He, in turn, grant comfort and consolation to you, His children on earth.

**תנצב"ה.**