

LEON WEINMAN

a eulogy

by

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I knew Leon for almost a quarter of a century, and genuinely loved him and his family. I got to know him rather quickly when I came to The Jewish Center as his Rabbi -- and I liked what I found, and so we became fast friends. It is in that capacity that I speak to you today -- as an old friend and a loyal comrade.

The concluding verse of the three-fold priestly blessing reads, Yisa ha-Shem panav elekha, which we normally translate, "May the Lord raise His countenance unto you." This, indeed, is the literal meaning of the verse -- may God turn His face to you, which is another way of saying, may He smile upon you. Panav means His panim, His face. However, one of the great Hasidic masters, the "Seer of Lublin," suggested that panav should be read not as the possessive of panim, but of penim -- meaning: inside, inwardness. In other words, may the Lord bless you with the quality of interiority, with a rich inner life, and share with you His own infinite capacity for inwardness.

Leon Weinman was so blessed. He had a vibrant inner life, deep feeling, warm sentiment. But more than that, he also experienced a remarkable consistency between his inner life and his outer life, his external relations and his internal world. His penimiut was reflected in his hitzoniut, and his hitzoniut influenced his penimiut.

The most immediate example of hitzoniut or outwardness is a person's clothing. What was significant about Leon in this respect was that he was always well dressed. He was always attractively attired, and somehow all "put together," with his handsome visage and prematurely white hair blending with tasteful clothing. This elegant, but never dapper, appearance was no accident; it revealed an inner elegance and charm and dignity. If he was, indeed, all

"put together" in outside appearance, he was disciplined and consistent in his inner life as well. That is why his relations with his fellow men can truly be said to have been elegant and tasteful. His demeanor was one of quiet dignity with a special sparkle that showed in his eyes. He was a man of equanimity and humility, and he respected learning and revered scholars.

Another example of outwardness is one's name. Leon's family name provided an important clue to his personality. Weinman or Wine-man means a man of wine. And wine in the Jewish tradition, from the Bible to Halakhah, symbolizes: joy. Ve'yayin yesamah levav enosh -- wine makes the heart of man happy (Prov. 104:15). Leon seemed to be possessed, at all times, of a quiet happiness reflected in a beaming face and friendly disposition.

It is a joy that was especially noticeable in his relations and his life with his family. His children Victor and Esther meant everything to him. He loved them, cared for them, worried about them, gave them an authentic Jewish education. He was proud of their achievements and, indeed, his greatest ambition was that they surpass him. He lived and fulfilled his life through them without at any time imposing upon them or demanding anything that went against their nature.

His relations with his beloved brothers and sisters was truly exemplary. The love and the friendship were self-evident.

To his father-in-law, Mr. Jules Moed, he was far more than a son-in-law; he was a special kind of son. To see them together was an object lesson in how to respect a father-in-law and how to love a son-in-law.



And what special affection and deep love he had for his grandchildren! I visited him for the last time only a few days ago, earlier this week. I found him generally calm, but agitated only about one thing. He revealed it to me: he wanted just enough time to be able to be present at the Bar Mitzvah celebration of his grandsons. Of course, that was not to be. He knew this well. Yet he was not bitter, only wistful and nostalgic, as it were, for some future events which he would never see with his own eyes. He had no complaints against God. "God owes me nothing," he told me, "He gave me a good life and I am grateful for it." This is the kind of simbah which was characteristically Leon's -- a "wine-man." For even in the situation of grave illness, anticipating the worst, he was able to find reason for joy.

And how paradoxical and cruel, my dear Elza, that today it is reversed for you: you are struck with grief on a day that should have been very happy for you -- your thirty-eighth wedding anniversary. But I know that, in keeping with Leon's values and perceptions, you too will, in time, attain his quality of joy. Together, you were a very happy and devoted couple. You found fulfillment in each other. He was exceedingly proud of you, especially of your communal activities. You gave to each other your best, and you reinforced each other's bliss.

The third example of outwardness is a man's occupation. And here too, Leon's business told us something about his inner life, for Leon was a gem, a many-faceted, pure, blue-white diamond! His life had a translucent quality; an uncompromised integrity, a deeply felt piety -- for he was truly a believer and a God-fearing

man, a selfless concern with others rather than with his own self-fulfillment and self-realization -- remarkably, an altruist in an age of narcissism.

So, in all ways Leon was inside and outside a very special man. The Sages of Israel referred to that as a man who tokho ke'varo, one whose inside and outside are identical. So it was with Leon, for his divine gift of penimiut accorded and resonated with his hitzoniut.

Leon proved something important in his life -- that you don't have to be nasty in order to be successful; you don't have to be rough in order to be a properly tough businessman; and you don't have to be devious in order to be bright. Leon was not loud or gregarious -- indeed, he was a shy and reserved man -- and yet he managed to develop and maintain beautiful friendships. Many people sought his company, and found him to be socially significant and personally delightful.

And Leon proved something important in his death as well -- that you don't have to give up hope in order to be realistic about grave illness. Indeed, he fought and wrested three good years from the claws of the Angel of Death. He taught us that as long as you are alive, you must not act as if you are haunted by the spectre of death; that you must live as normally and as happily as you can, without morbidity and self-pity; that the imminence of death must not disrupt the purity and integrity of your most intimate relationships but, on the contrary, must cement them with a new love and a new preciousness that issues from the awareness that time is short.

The end of the verse with which we began are the last three

words of the blessing of the Kohanim: ve'yasem lekha shalom, "may He grant you peace."

Leon's long struggle is over, the battle is done, and he has laid down his arms. He is entitled to peace.

Leon, dear friend, lekh be'shalom, go in peace back to your eternal Creator and, as a melitz yosher, plead for your family, for your community, and for all Israel.

May his soul be bound up in the bond of immortal life.