

Rabbi Norman Lamm

Eulogy for Louis Katz

Sept. 16, 1956

8-98

We are gathered here to bid a final farewell to our beloved Louis Katz on a day when Jewish Law discourages excessive weeping and proscribes words which cause the mourners to indulge in it. Our eulogy therefore shall be just that: not a dirge but a tribute to a man who so richly deserved the words of praise we shall speak and, even more, the unspoken love and admiration we all feel for him.

For indeed, the passing of Louis Katz is a tragedy for you of his family, for his many friends and associates, for Kodimoh and for the entire community. Let this be your consolation - that so many others share your grief and your sense of irreparable loss.

He was the patriarch of his family. And in the traditions of Jewish patriarchs of ages gone by, his exalted position in the family was attained by love and sympathy, by selflessness and kindness, by generosity and the great confidence you had in him.

Like the Kohen GADOL of old, who in his most sacred ministrations of the year, the AVODAH of Yom Kippur constantly referred to ANI U'VEISSI, "my family and I", so did Louis Katz live not only for ANI but for BEISSI, not only for himself but for his family. To his beloved wife he was a tower of strength who never left her side. I dare say that even now he will always be with her, as the strong, confident and loving husband he always was, inspiring her through memories as he did by his presence for so many years.



To his sister, Mrs. Leah Levi, and his brothers - Ben and Harry and William Katz - he was the elder brother in whose sage counsel and assistance they could always trust.

To his children Helen and Milton he was the epitome of Jewish fatherhood, a wise and devoted father who taught by loving example the lessons of family solidarity.

His children-in-law returned his love for them with unswerving, dedicated loyalty to him. To his beloved grandchildren and great grandchildren he always must and will remain their cherished and precious and patriarchal ZAIDE, who will live on in their memories as the symbol of goodness and Jewishness, and serve as an inspiration for them to emulate.

To you I leave this thought in the words of the Sages: BI'ZMAN SHE'MITZNEFFESS B'ROSH KOHEN GADOL ATARAH B'ROSH KOL ADAM,

"when the High Priest ministered, there was a crown on the head of every person". Now that he has gone to his eternal rest, keep on wearing that crown, that pride in him which encouraged you to better and more generous and more Jewish living. Have honor, and respect your mother and grandmother with even more love and devotion; live an even more genuinely Jewish life; pay even greater attention to the poor and the needy, as he did all his life, especially those smaller institutions of learning whom others tend to overlook.

Louis Katz shall be sorely missed in the community at large and by his many friends and associates who recognized in him the living example of honor and integrity and honesty.

Amongst his business associates his name "Mr. Louis" was mentioned with a reverence and awe that used to intrigue me.



"Mr. Louis" was the title of admiration bestowed on this man because of his impeccable reputation as a man of his word, a man whose promise was sacred and word holy. He was a perfectionist in integrity; he never failed to honor a promise and never desecrated a commitment.

The loss of ~~that~~ man of unimpeachable honorableness will long be felt in this city.

But his goodness and strength were not confined to family and friends and associates alone. He was the patron and sponsor of untold numbers of charitable organizations, who turned to him so frequently and found their requests answered immediately. Many are those who give; but few are those who give as Louis Katz did. His giving was not begrudging and cold. He gave with warmth and interest and sympathy. From personal experience I can say that he often gave without being solicited, especially where maximal Jewish education was concerned. When approached for assistance, he often gave the feeling that a favor was being done to him by giving him the opportunity to assist others. Such was the unique character of Louis Katz's philanthropy. This was more than just "charity" it was TZEDAKAH, the experience of MITZVAH, of fulfilling a religious obligation, that made it so different and refined and personal.

And certainly it was his religiousness, his undeviating loyalty to Torah, that so ennobled his character. Surely in the queer logic of our times, Louis Katz could have "afforded" to follow fad and fashion and forsake his principles. But it always will be remembered to his eternal credit that when lesser men

stumbled and lost contact with their convictions, he remained strong and courageous and determined to live according to his principles, which are the principles of Torah and Orthodox Judaism. It was Torah and his devotion to it that made him the person he was, and that explains so much of what was admirable and enviable in his character. And it was Torah which gave him the fortitude to face death so fearlessly, and which gave him strength and hope and stability in those dark moments when he wrestled so valiantly with despair in this last and difficult year.

We of Kodimoh shall miss him most grievously. Of him we can say the words we recited yesterday at the conclusion of the AVODAH service: EMESS MAH NEHDAR HAYAH KOHEN GADOL BE'TZEISSO MI'BEISS KODSHEI KODOSHIM B'SHALOM B'LI FEGN: "In truth, how majestic was the High Priest as he left the Holy of Holies in peace." He was majestic when he entered this sanctuary. He was majestic when he offered his devotions here. He is majestic even now as he leaves in peace.

We shall miss his dear and cherished presence when he occupied this pew where he opened his heart to G-d in deep sincerity and warmth.

We shall miss his aristocratic bearing as he stood beside the Torah on this platform in his capacity of Gabbai, a sacred office which he filled with dignity for so many years.

We shall miss his august stance as he stood before this Holy Ark and raised his hands in benediction, giving the priestly



blessing to our congregation.

We shall miss him in the councils of the Directors of our Synagogue, where he was acknowledged and acclaimed as the "Elder Statesman of Kodimoh", where his words of advise were always few and simple, but weighty with the wisdom that comes of age and experience and conviction.

To us of Kodimoh he was the last of the early pioneers through whose foresight this synagogue was built and through whose prestige its reputation was enhanced. To us he was elder statesman, prince and High Priest.

To me personally he was a true and trusted friend, to whom I turned in my moments of discouragement, who gave me the feeling that here was someone reliable, someone who would understand. To me he was not only a "member" and a friend but partly a grandfather whose simple wisdom was always a source of great encouragement.

Finally, before we conclude we address some words of an intimate nature to one member of his family in particular. Your period of mourning will come to a premature end because of the Sukkos holiday this Wednesday evening. And it was on Sukkos in the days of the Temple that a great and festive celebration took place - the SIMCHAS BEIS HA'SHO'AIVAH. Our Mishna describes in beautiful words the details of that festive time. A giant golden Menorah was built, and ladders erected to the tops of its stems. And the PIRCHEI KEHUNAH, the young priests, would be urged to climb the ladders and kindle the lights, while the older KOHANIM encouraged them and gave MI'BALA'EI MICHN'SEI HA'KOHANIM. Their old and worn priestly vestments to use as wicks for the menorah lights.



Milton, it is most appropriate to speak of SIMCHAH, of happiness and joy, at this occasion. For I am witness to the joy that you brought into your father's life, especially in his last and weakest year. Your devotion to him, your constant attendance at his side, was in the finest traditions of KIBBADAV of honor and respect for a father. But more than that, you brought warmth and happiness and "nachass" to your father in the twilight of his life. When I reported to him that you were coming regularly to Kodimoh and taking an active interest in the direction of its affairs, his face literally glowed with satisfaction. He bathed in the joy of "nachass" as he was told that he had lived to see that which he had not dared hope for - you, his son, ~~ascending~~ the great Menorah of Judaism and kindling the fire of Torah with the worn priestly garments that he had bequeathed to you. I too shed a tear when I saw his tears of happiness when he first heard that his son had begun to take his place before this Ark in pronouncing the Priestly Benediction and blessing the congregation. My secret in encouraging him in those last months was to tell him about you, and his whole ~~out-~~look would brighten as he said, in intense pride, "My Milton". You brought great light and joy and consolation into his life when in those last weeks it was you who recited the Psalms with him at his bed-side. If he was not afraid in those last gloomy weeks, it was because he knew that you would take his place, that the Menorah which he had kept alight during his life would not be dimmed and extinguished, but that his son would climb the spiritual ladder and take along the worn



vestments of his priestly father, the principles and convictions and faith of his guide, and with them keep the fires burning and keep aloft the torch of Torah. From my many conversations with him I can say with certainty that he died a happy man - happier than he had ever been. Milton, we have no doubt that you will continue to rise on that ladder. We welcome you in his place. There is nothing that he would have wanted more. All of you - his children and grandchildren - must now ascent the heights of Torah Judaism and rekindle the light of his faith.

With the passing of Louis Katz, his wife has lost a strong and devoted husband, his children a loving and dedicated father; his relatives and friends, a trusted and wise counsellor; the community - a man of unequalled integrity; the Kodimoh - its elder statesman and High Priest; and I a dear and devoted older friend.

T'HEI NISHMASSO TZERURAH BI'TZRUR HA'CHAYIM

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