

Mikey Butler

A Eulogy by Norman Lamm January 27, 2004

What an amazing young man Mikey was! A truly unique individual, one of our most outstanding students, present and former, his life deserves to become a legend at Y.U.

He was a handsome, fair-skinned and fair-haired young fellow, engaging and polite, with a winning and almost ubiquitous smile, a man of innate dignity who carried life lightly yet seriously. Despite terrible disabilities, he communicated with friends and teachers far and near – indeed, the whole world—through his computer. Mikey loved people. He was an אוהב את הבריות, and a true and loyal ירא שמים. It seemed that he was subject to a strange see-saw relationship: The more his body was afflicted – eyes and ears failing to function, constant and debilitating air-pain, lungs diseased, heart threatened—the higher the level of רוחניות that he attained; the more the disease battered his physical self, the more gracious and refined and dominant and pure his spiritual self became, & the more his נשמה shone with a special luminescence. He reminded me of the Torah's description of Egypt's failed policy of persecution of the בני ישראל -- כָּאֲשֶׁר יִעֲצוּ אֹתוֹ בְּנֵי יִרְכָה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ -- בני ישראל

Mikey was blessed w extraordinary parents. Nina and Dan Butler too suffered without complaining. They taught him to cherish living every day—ב"ה יום יום—to take full advantage of his clear mind and sharp intellect, his big heart and his fabulous charm—one might almost say charisma. They taught him--and he taught them—the meaning of ייסורים של אהבה—not only to accept suffering with love, but suffering because one whom you love is in pain.

The Talmud (*Yoma* 35b) records a fascinating passage about excuses for not learning Torah:

ת"ר עני ועשיר ורשע באין לדין לעני אומרים לו מפני מה לא עסקת בתורה? אם אומר עני הייתי וטרוד במזונותי, אומרים לו כלום עני היית יותר מהלל... עשיר, אומרים לו מפני מה לא עסקת בתורה? אם אומר עשיר הייתי וטרוד הייתי בנכסי, אומרים לו כלום עשיר היית יותר מרבי אלעזר... רשע, אומרים לו מפני מה לא עסקת בתורה? אם אומר נאה הייתי וטרוד ביצרי, אומרים לו כלום נאה היית מיוסף, אמרו עליו על יוסף הצדיק בכל יום ויום הייתה אשת פוטיפר משדלתו בדברים...

Hence, all excuses are vitiated. הלל מחייב עניים, the case of Hillel cuts the ground from any excuse of poverty as a reason to neglect Torah, and so on.

To that I would add: Pain and suffering as excuses are not to be taken seriously because of the standard set by Mikey Butler. Consider this: Fully one half of his life was spent in hospitals! Yet he was fully involved in all aspects of life – no complaints, no טענות against God. He lived a full life—passionate, engaged, committed, vital, active, transcending all pain and frustration and disappointments and sheer weariness. And – with a vibrant sense of humor!

I said that he was מחייב חולים. I want to modify that. Mikey was a very sick young man all his life. But, paradoxically, *he was one of healthiest people I ever met!* His maturity was amazing. He was fun to be with. He never obsessed about illness. His attitude was robust, outgoing, optimistic. He never dwelled on death, even though the המות מלאך was a daily presence; that awful angel never spooked him.

Mikey loved Y.U.; his whole family was a Y.U. family. When I gave him his BA diploma two years ago, the electric sense of joy was palpable; he was so very proud of it. And yet, he was a bit

sorry; you see, he so loved school that he hated to graduate...His school spirit was infectious, and he was a natural and acknowledged student leader.

Yesterday I received a hand-written letter from his cousin Menachem, written on Friday and delivered to me on Monday – just before I learned of his demise earlier that morning. I must read you the last paragraph of that letter just to give you an inkling into his incredible character. Bear in mind that I held “Dorm Talks” for many years but had not done so the last six months or so.

Finally, I spoke to my cousin Mikey Butler this week (on the internet) and I mentioned that you want to reinstate dorm-talks. Mikey asked if it would be possible for him to be involved with the process in one way or another. He mentioned that he would enjoy helping with the reinstitution of dorm talks, should his help be wanted.

I propose that all future Dorm Talks be known as the “**Mikey Butler Dorm Talks**” in his honor and in his memory.

So, in light of his healthy attitude it is not only true that מייקי בוטלר מחייב חולים; it is equally true that Mikey was מחייב בריאים! So there is no excuse for any of us – Mikey leaves us no escape route. We are all obligated to become selfless and involved in Torah, in communal work, in outreach, in encouraging the spread of תורה ומצוות. If he *could* do it, we *must* do it. This sweet, accommodating, helpful young man stands as a reproach to all of us – the sickly and the healthy, the poor and the rich, men and women, quick-witted or dull-witted. Maybe this is what חז"ל meant when they said: צדיקים במיתתם נקראים חיים, that the righteous are considered alive even after they are dead. Even after they are gone, their standards and their achievements remain a challenge to those still alive—and that means they live too.

Mikey had loads friends, great friends, legions of admirers. Ultimately, his greatest gift to us, one of the most important treasures of his legacy, what caused us so to admire him—is that he evoked in us what Abraham Lincoln called the “better angels our nature.” He brought out the best in us. We shall ever remember him – in our conduct and in our goals as well as in our memories.

In the Haftorah we read this past Shabbat, Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, Isaiah speaks to us in the Name of the Almighty, the unforgettable words: כִּי אֶנְחָמְכֶם, "כִּי אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אָמוּ תִנְחַמְנוּ כֹּן אֶנִּי אֶנְחָמְכֶם", "Even as a man who is comforted by his mother, so will I comfort you."

May his remarkable mother and father, his beloved siblings and family, find נחמה in his memory, proud that they raised such a very special and heroic son.

תהא נשמתו צרורה בצרור החיים