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"MEMORIES OF ZEIDE" --

in honor of the Yahrzeit of Yaakov David Lamm

Over a decade has passed since he was with us, a decade in which much has happened and in which the face of the world has been changed. During this lapse of time we have had the opportunity to view his life and death from a broader perspective, to submerge the minor details of his biography into the penumbra of our memory, and to bring out in clear and loving pastel-shades the more fundamental features of him and his life: in other words, the totality of Zeide. Perhaps the borders of the picture, the outlying regions of the mental portrait we have of him, are vague in the minds of many of us. But the central theme of the picture, the essential impression is, I believe, identical for all of us.

I have been asked to speak to you, my family, on this occasion of his yahrzeit. I can do no more than, in a few words, attempt to transmit to you what I think is the important part of the picture or impression that I have of him. Perhaps this very gathering of his family to remember him so reverently and lovingly is one aspect of the immortality of his soul. For can we not say that he lives on and lives again when, for a time, he dominates our train of thought? Biological or physical life is not the all of life. Man is a social animal, he lives among men, and therefore when he continues to occupy the minds and considerations of his fellows he cannot be said to have

died in the full sense of that word. I dare say that Moses and Isaiah and Maimonides are more alive today than most of us. It is in this sense that I maintain that the gestalt of Zeide which hovers above us here, today, is alive in our memory of his indomitable warmth and essential humanity. We welcome him into our midst.

I feel that it is unfortunate for me not to have known him more and better than I did. But those memories I do have, I cherish, and I hope you will allow me to share some of them with you.

My very first memory of him - and I feel that the same is true for my brother and many of my cousins, particularly Honny and Tzibby - is that of Zeide the Storyteller. This wonderful man with the long white beard and smiling eyes told the most fascinating stories which ranged from Adam and Eve to the Belzer Rebbe and ran the entire gamut of society from Baron Rothschild to the town beggar. There was an art in the way he told them because he certainly charmed us, and the charm remained because it was indigenous to him; the charm of his tales was a reflection of his own personal grace - and who could fail to be fascinated by that "hadras panim"!

But, more than from his stories, I derived my greatest pleasure from being able to serve him personally. Mere words are too prosaic to describe my exhilaration and supreme joy at being able to bring Zeide his "shtek-shich." Bringing him his bathrobe - which I still have today - was for me a rite, a religious act, from which I derived an almost hedonistic pleasure. And when, two weeks before he passed away, I was able to help him bathe, I regarded myself as the most privileged of his grandchildren.

When, in his last months, he lived with us, I found myself a witness to a workshop in human relations. Object lessons in proper behavior and respect between father and son, father-in-law and daughter-in-law, followed in rapid succession. I always wondered what it was that made my own father, may he live and be well, act with such profound devotion to his father, always always without a complaint and, on the contrary, with the hope that he could do more. I never understood why my mother should constantly sing the praises of her father-in-law and attend to him with the care usually reserved by a mother for her own children. And, most important, the exceptionally humane attitude that Zeide took. How appreciative he was of even the smallest things. I shall never forget the title he bestowed upon my mother - "die malachte"!

You are all my relatives and you therefore probably know who my other grandfather, my mother's father, was; and you probably know how close I was to him. Then let me say that to this day I wonder at the great and unbounded respect, admiration, and love that one Zeide had for the other. Each held the other up on a pedestal and praised him to heaven itself. It is interesting and fortunate that their character-streaks were so similar. And I will let you in on a secret; a year and a half ago my mother's father, of blessed memory, was on his deathbed in Rockaway, and one of his last requests, which due to certain conditions could unfortunately not be realized, was - that he should be laid to eternal rest beside my other Zeide, the man whose yahrzeit we commemorate today. I do not believe that I have to elaborate upon the significance of this request.

And now, if you will permit me to diverge into "darshanus," homiletics, I should like to continue painting this portrait by drawing an analogy between Zeide's name and he himself. His name was Reb Yaakov David, and these two "avos ha'umah," patriarchs, whose names he carried, Jacob and David, were relived to a great extent in his own life.

When, as a young boy, I studied the life history of Jacob, my childish imagination traveled the circuit of history with supersonic daring, for in my mind I completely identified Jacob with Zeide. No, not Abraham and Isaac -- only Jacob. When Jacob meets Pharaoh and the Egyptian monarch asks Jacob about his age and his life, Jacob replies:

אני זקן ורעיון בן ימי חיי ושל אבותי לא ימי
אבותי לא ימי חיי "Few and difficult were the

days of the years of my life, and they have not reached those of my ancestors in the days of their wanderings." Zeide lived a comparatively long life, yet he could not, perhaps, count as many moments of happiness as he would have liked to. His life was not all a pleasure trip. It was at times fraught with difficulties, and these difficulties forced him to take to the wanderer's staff and make off for a new continent, at first without his family. Zeide, I believe, referred to himself as a "bavuste kabtzan." Yet, despite the fact that he, as Jacob, was sick when he died, his last years were happy ones. Like Jacob who lived to see his entire family before him, so too Zeide, at the end of his days, was a happy man. Life for him was then full, ripe, matured, satiated.

David was Zeide's second name. And David was the most glorious king of Israel. But David's importance in history lies not so much in his military accomplishments, as in his divine songs, his "tehillim"; for thousands of years Jews of all types have read and reread the holy words of the Psalms to gain inspiration, to give vent to their woes and worries and to express their happiness and joy. The essence of David in his Tehillim, the most Divine Poem to grace the human community. It is in this sense that Zeide was at one with King David the Psalmist. For whoever knew Zeide will recognize that he was Tehillim. His face, his countenance, his appearance were poetic. His life and his personality were a Divine Poem whose stanzas echoed the profound piety of the composer of the Psalms and the many varied experiences which pulsate through the dried pages of the Tehillim with the freshness which is Sincerity's own. If the lines in Zeide's face were lines of poetry recalling the hardships and suffering and the abnormalities of a wanderer's exile life, then his flowing white beard were flowing verses whose clear rythm related the whiteness and purity of soul and personality, piety, and charitableness; and his deep-set sparkling eyes were gems of poetry which sung of a deep profound faith and sparked with nobility of character.

In his death, too, Zeide contained the elements of David and Jacob. I remember with striking clarity the details of his demise, and I have no doubt that you do too. There is no need, therefore, to retell all the incidents. But let us see, in a very general way, how his death resembled that of the two Great Ones of Israel.

David, the Talmud tells us, was a man who was reluctant to die. But even David must go the way of all flesh. And it was on a Shabbos, after Mincha when the sun was setting that the Malach Ha'mavess, the Angel of Death, began shuffling the branches at the top of one of the trees in David's garden. David went out to see what the cause of the disturbance was and, when he saw the Angel, he died. The David whom we speak of today, Zeide, was also at the Shabbos of his long life, and it was after Mincha, towards the evening of life, "bein ha'shmashos," when the sun begins to dip gracefully below the horizon and the first rays of darkness begin to penetrate the western skies. And Zeide looked about his garden, and he looked at the tops of the trees where the last rays of the sun were quickly receding and darkness was ominously creeping up, creeping up in the black form of the cosmic Malach Ha'mavess, the Hitlerian Angel of Death, and the modern holocaust began to make itself felt in Europe, as tension mounted and the fate of six million people was sealed. And then, just then, Zeide died as did David in a comparable situation. All we can say is -- may be it was better that way, maybe it was better that he was spared the agony to which we have been subjected.

When Jacob died, he had all his family gathered about him. And the Sages tell us that Jacob was a worried man. He kept tossing from side to side and in his mind he pondered his problem: Perhaps I too am leaving the world with an imperfect family? My grandfather Abraham^{un} was/fortunate in that he had a Ishmael in his family, and my father

Isaac left an Esau to the world. Am I dying as the patriarch of a complete and wholesome family? - or am I too leaving the world an Esau or Ishmael? And when Jacob's children detected their father's worry, they replied in one voice to their father Jacob, whose name was also Israel, *שמע ישראל יהוה אחד*, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One", the God whom you worshipped is the God whom all of us shall forever worship. And when Jacob heard this he answered, *ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד*, "Blessed be the Name of His glorious Kingdom forever and ever."

Zeide, too, as he lay on his deathbed, looked about him and worried lest there be some deep-rooted defect in the family which sprung from his loins; like Jacob who recalled the serious imperfections in the families of Abraham and Isaac, Zeide scanned the society in which he lived and saw that other Abrahams and Isaacs and Jacobs, other men with long white beards and "peyahs" had no reason to feel proud of their children and grandchildren. And then when Zeide looked at us and the worried look in his eyes and the creases in his forehead became obvious to the family, an inner voice in each and every one of us responded, *שמע ישראל יהוה אחד*, "Hear, O Zeide, the God whom you worshipped is our God, your tradition shall be ours, and we will, in our way of life, perpetuate your ideals and your principles of Godliness, faith, honesty and humanity." I have no doubt that his last words, though inaudible, were: *ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד*.

In conclusion, let me suggest that we remember the silent vows we each took at his deathbed, so that our "Shma Yisroel" and his "Baruch shem k'vod" shall not have been in vain. It is fitting that we hold up his life as a model for our own lives. It is proper that the memory of Zeide should be integrated into our moral and ethical fibre; and that, in short, Zeide should take his place as part of the conscience of each and every one of us.