

Eulogy for Rabbi David Kahane

1. As I rise to speak a eulogy over my friend Rabbi David Kahane, I think back to a eulogy that David delivered--not our David Kahane, but David King of Israel, who lamented as follows over the death of his commander-in-chief, Abner:  
 "Know ye not that a **prince and great man** has fallen this day in Israel?" (--II Samuel 3:38). *He referred to him as both a "prince" and a "great man."*

There are some people who occupy high and responsible positions; they are, by virtue of these positions, "princes," leaders. And there are those whose qualities are innate, who possess virtues independent of any worldly position. They are "great"--in and of themselves.

Our David was both--a **שר**, a prince, a leader, a superb congregational rabbi--and a **גדול**, a great human being endowed with marvelous qualities of heart and mind. Look at his congregation and you can see that he was a prince, a true and tried leader. Look at his family and you can see that he possessed greatness.

2. As a professional, he earned the love and respect and admiration of his congregation. He came here to a small, unknown congregation with more potential than reality, and--with the help of devoted congregants and community leaders whom he inspired with his vision of what could be accomplished--he built this into a congregation renowned throughout the city. His spirit, his personality, *had their* ~~has its~~ finger-prints all over every activity of this institution, and his influence was felt in every family.

3. He was, as his surname indicates, a **כהן**, a descendant of Aaron, the High Priest of Israel. And the Talmud wonders, concerning the **כהנים**, whether **הני כהני שלוחי דידן או** **הני כהני דרחמנא**... But clearly, in the case of our Kohen-Kahane, he was both: a messenger from the Almighty to his people, bringing to his beloved congregation the teachings of divine care and concern and compassion, the teachings of Torah and Tradition; and the ambassador of his people to their Father in Heaven, bearing to Him their pains and their joys, their loves and hopes, their frustrations and their aspirations.

4. He had the capacity to bring out in others what Abraham Lincoln called, "the better angels of our nature." *That* is what being a rabbi is all about. He was, in this respect, a prince in his community. And he loved being a rabbi--I don't think he ever wanted to do anything else.

5. His greatness as a human being was evident to me from his earliest youth. I knew DK from the time we both entered first grade in YTV, and from there to YU, for college and thereafter rabbinical school. We both had our characters and spiritual personae fashioned at YU. I knew him, then, for some 62 years... and not once do I remember ever, ever entertaining a negative thought about him. Both as a friend and as a professional, he was



never confrontational; he was an inclusive type, not an excluding one. He was always a warm, affable, loving person. I remember the last time I was with him and Betty, only several weeks ago, and he grabbed my hand and kissed it. I was initially embarrassed, but then suffused with deep friendship for this man who meant what he did and said with all his heart. -- and this gave love & affection & understanding.

6. His אהבת הבריות, his love for his fellow man, came to him by inheritance. I knew his father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Kahane, ז"ל, very well--I even recall his presence at my Bar Mitzvah! He cut an impressive figure in Williamsburg of half a century ago--Rabbi of the eminent Clymer St. Shul, a big man, handsome, twirling a silver-tipped cane, wearing a large, heart-warming smile. He was known far and wide as a גומל חסדים, one who always was ready to do a favor and show kindness, who exploited his acquaintanceship with the rich and the powerful and the politically connected to help the poor, the needy, the unemployed, the disadvantaged. I know from personal experience: as I was growing up, gratitude to this wonderful man was part of our family tradition. And David was blessed with these characteristics, inherited from his father. He came from good, very good stock --and he made the best of it.

הוא היה אדם  
אשר היה לו  
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7. David Kahane was blessed with the gift of courage--and with a wife whose charm and goodness were exceeded only by her boundless loyalty and love. He confronted his debilitating illness and emerged from the depths of despair to a remarkable degree of recovery because of his admirable courage. And he did it with the constant loving attention of Betty, his priceless help-meet.

8. I think, in this respect, of what the other David, David King of Israel, expressed as the deepest desire of his heart: אחת שאלתי מאת ה' אותה אבקש, שבתי בבית ה' כל ימי חיי לחיות. "One thing I ask of the Lord: that I be privileged to dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the pleasantness of the Lord, and to visit in His temple."

King David was fated to spend most of his life building a kingdom, and hence in administration, politics, and war. Rabbi David had his life fulfilled in accordance with the vision of King David. He was indeed privileged to spend his career--"all the days of his life"--in this synagogue... And his years here were blessed with success--and pleasantness. Here he built his exceptional family--Betty and their three splendid children, Ruby and Levi and Michelle--God-fearing, ethical, "menschlich"--and they were for them a source of נועם, pleasantness.

The third element, however, is special: לבקר בהיכלו to be מבקר in His temple. "Visit"??? No--from בוקר, morning, dawn.....

9. My personal feelings are perhaps best summarized in two lines by William Butler Yeats:

Think where a man's glory most begins and ends,  
And say my glory was I had such a friend