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YAHREZEIT - ZEIDE

1. 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 sentimental 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, is 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. And 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 the 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 ~~in~~fortunate for me not to have known him more and better than I did. But those memories I do have, them 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 Tsibi - is that of Zei 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 charm - 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 years, 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 him with the care usually reserved by a mother for her own children. And, most important,

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"Few and difficult were the days of the years of my life, and they have not reached these 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 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. For the essence of David is his Tehillim, the most Divine Poem to grace the human community. And 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 Tehillim 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 rhythm related the whiteness of purity of soul and person-

ality, 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 death, 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 to-day, 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, 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 -- maybe 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 was unfortunate 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 Ishamel? 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 L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One", the G-d whom you worshipped is the G-d 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 loved 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 G-d whom you worshipped is our G-d, your tradition shall be ours, and we will, in our way of life, perpetuate your ideals and your principles of G-dliness, faith, honesty and humanity". I have no doubt that his last words, though inaudible, were: *שמע ישראל יהוה אחד*

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 *libre* ; and that, in short, Zeide should take his place as part of the conscience of each and every one of us/