

EULOGY
for
FOR HENRY LINDENBAUM

by

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I rise to speak the eulogy over Henry Lindenbaum out of pain, of course, and out of love and sympathy -- but mostly out of numbness.

We read from the Torah that when Aaron, brother of Moses, lost his two children, that va-yidom aharon. The accepted translation is that Aaron was silent. Silence indeed is the most sensible reaction to the enormity of the disaster that has overtaken this family and our community. What can one say about this terrible coincidence, this repetition of a an unspeakable tragedy: his father was killed in a crash at the age of 47 and now Henry is killed in a crash at age 45, leaving a wife in the prime of her youth; mothers and brothers and sister to relive the pain of the old wound even as the new one sinks its teeth into them; and children bereft of a father whom they idolized.

But there is a second translation of that Scriptural term va-yidom (attributed to the Jerusalem Targum) and that is, ve'shabbach, "and Aaron praised." The plain meaning of that commentary is that Aaron, despite his grief, praised God. But why not interpret that to mean, as well, that he praised his deceased children?

We are here to say farewell to Henry and to bemoan him -- but also to give him the praise he so richly deserved.

Perhaps the most salient feature of his short life was his capacity for growth. Orphaned of a wonderful father when very

young, angry and resentful at his harsh fate, a rebellious child -- he grew and matured to a pleasant, warm, gracious, tranquil, loving, and loveable adult.

He gallantly overcame his childish pique to become a splendid human being -- and, as well, a highly successful businessman.

In his business dealings and in all his relationships he was impeccably honest. He conducted himself with unsullied honor and uncompromised integrity. He was fair, straight, ethical -- a true gentleman.

Henry never spoke an evil word about another person, and no person ever had anything bad to say about him. His character was never touched by envy. No matter what his situation, he was never jealous of others.

He took a leadership role in the Jewish community and in his Synagogue, as befits the grandson of the immortal Rabbi Amiel. He had a deep and abiding interest in Jewish education. He often consulted me about Jewish educational problems. One of the last things he said to his father, Max Stern, was that he had to talk to me about certain improvements in Jewish education and teacher training that he would like to see instituted at Yeshiva University.

Surly, this growth was a sign of resilience of character, of fineness and the nobility of his psychic make-up.

What was Henry like to his family, to his friends, to his admirers?

The Scriptural portion we read this week begins after the death of the two sons of Aaron. It is largely concerned with

the description of the Yom Kippur service as it was done in the Temple of old. The main service was not on the eve of Yom Kippur, but in the morning, at the crack of dawn. The Mishnah tells us that a special messenger was placed to announce the coming of dawn by calling out the words, Barkai, dawn has come, and He'ir Ha-mizrach, the eastern skies have begun to light up. How interesting: after the death of the young priests, we remember and celebrate -- the dawn!

So when this handsome, smiling Adonis walked into a room, one felt like calling out Barkai! -- It was as if dawn had suddenly arrived, bathing all corners with his own golden sunshine. He'ir Ha-mizrach! With him came the Eastern light. Tall, attractive, golden-haired Henry!

He had an infectious enthusiasm about him, a zest for life. He was a great athlete -- skier, sailor, hiker -- and he was nimble, mechanically adept, fully coordinated.

Henry was a completely sociable being. He had time for everybody. In his friendships he made no social or economic distinctions. He put on no airs. There was not even a trace of snobbism about him. He loved good conversation, and was a gracious and lively host.

Henry was as completely a happy man as I have ever met. He was an irrepressible optimist, and always had a sanguine outlook. Henry was easy going: His relationships were smooth, and knew of no knots, no snags, no jagged ends.

And what a charming and uproarious sense of humor he had! He had a keen awareness of the funny, of the absurd, of the

comic. He was capable of hearty laughter. He'ir Ha-mizrach -- his was a morning sunshine!

What meant most to Henry was his family. That family was the center and focus of his whole existence.

Henry was orphaned at the age of eight, but mourned his father far more than the mandatory twelve months. Although his innate happiness overcame his grief, it never diminished his deep love for his father.

He was a loyal and devoted son to his lovely mother Ghity, and a sweet and loving brother to Madie and Marcel and Armand. Above all, he was a proud Lindenbaum and adored his family.

When he came into the Stern family he became a devoted son to Max and a splendid brother to Stanley and Lenny and Gloria.

He had great affection for his mother-in-law and all of Ruth's family. He referred to them as, "my Montreal family."

When tragedy struck a few days ago, all the family rallied round him, Ruth, and the family -- helping, reassuring, encouraging, arranging -- exactly as Henry would have done for others.

Henry deserved it, because he was an example to all the family, to all sisters and brothers and to children, on how to live on the highest level of honor and affection.

His marriage was, for both him and Ruth, a fairy tale. This Prince Charming deeply loved his Fairy Queen. She never took him for granted. She was always amazed at her good luck at being in his enchanted kingdom in which she spent twelve beautiful years -- only twelve years, but great ones.

But most of all, Henry and Ruth lived for their children.

Avi, Micheal, and Philip were his life, his love, his pride, his "nachas." They idolized him, they loved his stories, they adored his involvement with them and his strength and his courage and his smile. They followed him like three ducklings. They would just hear his car in the driveway, and all would rush out to greet him. For them certainly, He'ier Ha-mizrach, the sun rose and set with their father.

To you, his children, let me say this: You will always remember him, and his strength and joy and love will always be with you and make you safe and happy. His memory will give you courage and warmth and comfort -- and a sense of honor.

Because of the trauma of his father's death when he was a child, Henry was always aware of the fragility of life and the mortality of man. Part of his energy and activity stem from his consciousness that life is short, too short. He often said: Let's do things now. We can always sleep later. While we are alive we must be active. But this awareness of mortality never degenerated into morbidity. It never put a damper on his joie de vivre.

Just before the tragic accident that took his life, Henry closed a chapter in the book of his life. Did he have a premonition about what was to come? This is idle speculation, but the fact is that he had just initiated the sale of his business.

Henry had a series of appointments last week that, in retrospect, can be seen as farewell. On Wednesday, he had lunch with his brother Armand, and there was no agenda or special

reason for it. On Thursday he made it his business to be with Marcel, again for no special reason. That day, too, he called Leonard; it was a long and leisurely and friendly talk, with no special reason -- and a bit mystifying to Leonard. In Montreal over the weekend he seemed to take his leave in a way that appeared to be out of context, as if he were saying "good bye" instead of "so long"...

On Wednesday night, before leaving for Montreal, when Max Stern was home with no thought of going to the hospital, Henry said, "Dad, I want to thank you for all you have done for me, given to me, and meant to me all my life -- and for teaching me to work hard and become a success."

Did Henry know something in a mysterious, intuitive way? All we know is that his short, sun-filled life had a remarkably rounded quality to it, a sense of wholeness and completion.

Now Henry is gone and we know what we have lost.

He came into our midst like a gorgeous dawn, lighting up the Eastern skies with his smile and his joy. And now it is dusk, and darkness has descended.

His life was like a gorgeous, sunny day with not a cloud in the sky, but a day that was all too short, all too brief.

Now that glorious sun has set, and we are bereft of that lustrous source of light and warmth and love and mirth.

We go into the long, long night ahead, comforted only by the memory of the eternal dawn that was Henry.

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