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EULOGY FOR PROF. BRUNO KISCH

I confess that I am unequal to the task that has been assigned to me this evening. This feeling of inadequacy derives from my conviction that it is psychologically disturbing, logically absurd, and even spiritually sacrilegious to speak of Prof. Bruno Kisch in the past tense. I have not yet reconciled myself to the idea that he is no longer with us. I recognize it as an objective fact, but I cannot accord it subjective validity. For Prof. Kisch, despite his outward serenity, was a man of great vitality and possessed a restless mind that ranged over the whole spectrum of human endeavor.

This restlessness and vitality was evident to anyone who entered the home of the Kisch's -- and I had the privilege of doing so several times, although, alas, all too few. Books were stacked high on all walls of the room. On one wall one could see an ancient set of the Talmud, which bore signs of constant and regular use. On another side of the room, one could notice rows of cardiograms strewn amongst the tomes of venerable philosophers of all ages and lands. Here there were sheets of music used by Mrs. Kisch, there there were works of art, and yet in another corner ancient coins. What dynamic cultural interests were reflected in this home! One rebels



against the idea that this home has now lost its head and its pride: the scion of a great rabbinic family of Prague and Zurich; the husband of a distinguished lady, his beloved wife, who is an accomplished artist in her own right; the brother of one of the most eminent Jewish historians of our time; the father of children who themselves are carving out careers in science and the advancement of culture.

Dr. Kisch was a Renaissance man. His virtuosity was amazing. In an age when specialization means, almost as a logical corollary, general ignorance in all but one area of knowledge, he specialized in an astounding number of different fields. In our own tradition he would be known as ish ha-eshkolot, a term the Talmud applies to two of the greatest teachers in our history. Literally, eshkol means a bunch of grapes, and the idea of this title is the indication that such a man possesses an abundance of disciplines, a whole cluster of types of wisdom. Ish ha-eshkolot was defined by the Jewish tradition as ish asher kol bo, a man who has everything! Prof. Kisch was just this sort of man: physician, philosopher, pioneer in cardiology, expert in numismatics, trail-blazer in electron microscopy, student of the Talmud, historian of science -- one can go on and on.

Perhaps of all his varied interests, the key to his personality was his profound knowledge of a rather esoteric branch of knowledge: he was the curator of the Clark Streeter Collection



of Weights and Measures in Yale University. In every aspect of his life he demonstrated the quality of middah, of a man of moderation who approached life in a measured pace, who gave everything its due weight. He was a living example of Maimonides' teaching of the Golden Mean. To his scientific researches he brought a penchant for accuracy and precision. His philosophic thinking was never fuzzy; to the world of abstract ideas he brought the measured cadences of the disciplined scientist. As a human being, in his social contacts, too, he brought the quality of middah: he was a man of justice and fairness and decency. Yehudah Halevi described the ideal man as one who is as the governor of a city: to every activity and need he gives its just and due measure, so that the entire community operates in perfect harmony. So the righteous man lives in a harmonious balance of his entire personality. Such was Prof. Kisch: systematic, organized, just, faithful, moderate -- even in his appearance and in his speech. I thank the Almighty that I was privileged to experience, personally, the presence of this kind of personality; for he was my dear friend, a respected congregant, and a revered teacher and, later, colleague on the faculty of Yeshiva University.

But there is an exception to this quality of measured moderation. The Rabbis of the Midrash tell us that kol ha-devarim yesh lahem middah, everything has a measure: shamayim yesh lahem



middah, the heavens can be measured; mayim yesh lahem middah, the waters can be measured. U-mi ein lahem middah u-mispar -- what or who is it that has neither measure nor number? Elu Yisrael -- the people of Israel, concerning whom the prophet Hosea said that they shall never be measured or counted.

The one area where Prof. Kisch, along with his beloved wife, failed to abide by the rule of measure and moderation was that of Israel: the love of the people of Israel, faith in the God of Israel, the observance and study of the Torah of Israel. To Yidishkeit he brought boundless love, unlimited enthusiasm, an infinite zeal which knew no restraint. For him being religious was not prudential; it was the essence of his life. Torah was the expression of his deepest yearning and his most profound longing. This giant among men was deeply in love with Israel, its Torah, and its God.

When such an individual passes away, the void simply cannot be filled. The loss, the grief, the mourning cry out for consolation. On behalf of all your dear friends and the admirers of the late Dr. Bruno Kisch, we offer you -- Mrs. Kisch and Prof. Guido Kisch -- our sincerest and most heartfelt consolation. But not only you need consolation. We, all of us, the entire Jewish community, desperately need consolation as well.

And I will go a step further: not only does his family need to be consoled, not only does the bereaved Jewish community



require consolation; even God Himself, as it were, needs to be consoled!

The great Hebrew writer, Sh. Y. Agnon, in a brief eulogy for the martyrs of the Holy land, once said the following: When an ordinary mortal king goes into battle, he sends forth his soldiers as a group, but does not consider them as individuals. If one soldier falls, another can take his place. It makes little difference to the king who the individual soldiers are, or what are their needs, their loves or hates or aspirations. Generals fight their wars by commanding divisions and corps, not individual fighters. But the King of Kings of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, is not so. When one of His soldiers falls, that soldier is irreplaceable. Every one of God's troops is unique. The Lord does not deal with His own people as statistics, but as wholly unique individuals. And, therefore, when one of the soldiers in God's army dies, that place remains empty forever, and none can replace him. That is why, when such a person passes away, we say the Kaddish, which is a form of consolation for God, as we offer Him our condolences for His grievous and irreparable loss: Yitgadal ve'yitkadash shemeih rabbah, may His great Name be magnified and sanctified. When one of God's soldiers dies -- and they are so few and so precious! -- God's shemeih rabbah, Great Name, is diminished and profaned; and therefore we pray that this great Name yitgadal ve'



yitkadash, may be magnified and sanctified. This loss is an eternal one, and God's Kingdom is therefore lessened and weakened. So we pray, ve'yamlikh malkhuteih, that the Lord's Kingdom may be restored after this terrible loss.

A Bruno Kisch is a rare phenomenon in any age and in any climate. This brilliant thinker and distinguished Jew was a loyal and unique soldier of God. His death is a loss not only to his family and friends, not only to the community and our people, but to God Himself. Bruno Kisch cannot be replaced. Yet we pray that he shall at least be succeeded by others who are somewhat like him, by children and grandchildren who will be inspired by his example.

So, may God's great Name be magnified and sanctified, and His Kingdom be restored, be'hayyekhon u-ve'yomekhon, in our lifetime; so that the life of Mrs. Kisch and the family may be blessed, and their grief assuaged by the knowledge that his noble and sublime memory will serve as an everlasting inspiration to their children and children's children after them.