

Eulogy for Hymie Estrin Chaim ben Arie Leib

Died October 5, 1999

This coming Shabbat we begin another year of reading our Torah as we study Bereisheit- Genesis.

While Bereisheit begins with the creation of the world, the primary emphasis of the Book of Creation is how the Patriarchs fashioned a family into the nation that became the Chosen People.

As Rambam and others point out in their commentaries on Genesis, the events in the lives of the Patriarchs were portents for the future history of their descendants.

Choice, sorting the good from the bad, and tests are the primary themes of Genesis.

The universe is a mixture of good and evil, and it is the responsibility of each individual, in his or her own life, to choose the good and spurn the evil. Thus Noah stands out when humanity becomes corrupt; Abraham stands tall when everyone else fails; Isaac and Jacob prevail over Ishmael and Esau; and Jacob's family emerges unblemished to carry on the legacy of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob's; Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

Jewish tenacity in the service of God was forged in the tests of the patriarchs and matriarchs, and it remained impregnable throughout history. All this was created not in the first six days, but in the twenty-two centuries of the Book of Genesis.

I believe that we continue to be partners with God as we strive to make this world a better place for all humanity, and each of us finds our own way to share in this partnership.

In Chapter 3, verse four of Bereisheit we read "*leeshmor et derech eitz ha-chaim.*" Guard the road to the tree of life.

According to Rabbi Mordechai HaCohen our teachers said that 'road' or *derech* refers to proper conduct. *Eitz chaim* - the tree of life - this is the Torah. This teaches that proper conduct must come even before study of the Torah.

Referring to this teaching - Rabbi Mendele of Kotzk used to say that proper conduct is a preface to the Torah; just as from the preface you recognize the content of the book, so it is possible to recognize from a man's manners and the traits of his conduct, what his Torah is like.

Just as we study our Torah to learn from and be inspired by our great leaders we also receive guidance and inspiration from those with whom we have shared the world in our time.

In speaking with some of Hymie Estrin's family yesterday I was able to confirm what I already knew, that this gentle, loving and kind person was a true guide on the *derech erez*, the right path, to a life of proper conduct.

Hy was born 80 years ago in Calgary, spending his early years there and in Lethbridge. He was descended from a family of learned men and rabbis including Shlomo Estrin, the first rabbi at Beth Israel Synagogue in Edmonton. Hymie's father, Louis, was also a knowledgeable man but chose a more secular life, traveling throughout western Canada and the US as cattle and fur buyer. With eight children to support, opportunities for a traditional Jewish education were set aside as the boys went to work early in life with their father. Hy didn't enjoy the traveling life. In those days paved highways, and bridges over the northern rivers were unheard of and there were too many close calls for his liking.

Fortunately he was able to make a change and he began a career that he would excel at for the rest of his working life. He moved to Edmonton where his Uncle Abe Estrin and Morris Gofsky operated Capital Cleaners. Here he literally learned the business from the ground up. He washed floors, painted, pressed clothes, did anything that was asked of him and most important he developed a love for the business. Shortly after moving to Edmonton he met Goldy Hurtig at a party at the Shragge family's home. Goldy remembers being very impressed with Hy, especially after he told her that he was an ice skater and a swimmer. Only later did she find out that he was afraid of water and had never put skates on in his life. But by then they were in love and after a three-year courtship they were married by Rabbi Eisen in 1942.

With the few dollars that each had saved they were able to buy a dry-cleaning plant in Claresholm in southern Alberta. It was located near an air force base and with a guaranteed contract from the base and their combined hard work they were able to make the business a success.

With the imminent arrival of their first son David in 1945 they returned to Edmonton where they bought a dry-cleaning store on Whyte Avenue called Cosmo Cleaners. Hy poured his life into the new business while Goldy raised David and in 1949 gave birth to Bernie.

Hy was a visionary in his field and saw that the trend toward leather fashions would require specialized processes for cleaning. He took courses in the US and then invented his own processes for leather and suede cleaning, quickly becoming the recognized leader in his field. The Whyte Avenue store was now known as Mr. Suede - King of Guaranteed Leather Cleaners, and Hy's face soon became familiar throughout the west as he franchised his process to dry cleaners throughout Alberta,

BC and Saskatchewan.

He served on the executive of the National Association of Suede and Leather Refinishers of America. His dry-cleaning operation was visited by other cleaners from throughout North America. He was frequently consulted for advice, and spoke at many of the association's national conventions. Despite being self trained he earned the respect and admiration of his colleagues for his innovation and dedication to an industry that he devoted 50 years of his life to.

While his business took up his days and many nights as well, he still took time to care for his family as they shared in the benefits of his hard work. Always regretting that he was denied a full Jewish education, Hy ensured that both David and Bernie attended Talmud Torah and that the family attended Beth Shalom Synagogue. He developed a passion for opera and helped guide the career of a young singer from Edmonton named Ermano Moro. He and Goldy traveled throughout North America to see him perform and eventually saw him become a lead tenor at both Covent Garden in London and the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

The family made frequent visits to Banff and Jasper and to California to visit uncles, aunts and cousins there. Twenty five years ago Hy and Goldy visited Hawaii for the first time and fell in love with the surroundings and the opportunity to escape from our cold winters. My wife and I had the privilege of spending a day with Hy and Goldy a few years ago in Hawaii as they took us on a tour of Oahu and then showed us their beautiful condo. I know that Hy was proud that his hard work allowed him to share his good fortune with others. He had a wonderful sense of humour. He was generous and kind, with never a bad thing to say about anyone else.

In a few minutes David and Bernie will add a few personal remarks about their father, but I must say how much he loved and cherished his grandchildren.

Bernie's oldest child Jules had Hy to himself for a long time and was doted on by a loving grandfather and with the later arrival of Gail's son, Robbie, David and Pam's children Gabriel, Seth and Simone, and Bernie and Gail's daughter, Ashley, Hy came into his glory and was the best grandfather any child could ask for. Visits to Toronto were a special treat for Gabriel, Seth and Simone and especially for Hy who seemed to shed years from his life as he played with them on swings and slides.

Just a few months ago Hy was able to share in the excitement of Ashley's Bat Mitzvah at Beth Shalom and swelled with pride as she read from the Torah and chanted the haftarah before family and friends from all over Canada and the US. Looking back, we were blessed to have Hy with us for so many years. When he was 10 years old he came down with scarlet fever and developed a heart murmur. Despite this he worked hard in his business and in his family life, never allowing his affliction to stop him from enjoying life to the fullest. In the last few years his heart

disease began to take his toll, but his warm personality and sense of humour continued to shine through any pain he may have been suffering.

He left us peacefully Tuesday morning, knowing that he had guided his family, his friends and his community on a *derech eretz*, a path that each of us can walk as we pursue our own Torah of life.

Tehi nishmato Tzroora beetzror ha- chaim

May his soul be bound up in the bond of life