



My dear friend and mentor Rabbi Yisroel (Ernest) Farkas passed last night.

I first met him at the *Daf Yomi* of Reb Yehoshua Eichenstein shlit'a in 1993 and was drawn to his sweetness already back then. Since then I became a devotee of this autodidact who would approach one and all accepting them unconditionally. Having been taught in England (post war) by Holocaust survivors who felt that education was best accomplished by the stick and by ridicule, this small quiet man whose energy was at times mystifying was a breath of fresh air. How did he retain his wonder about life, his faith and his ongoing passion for Torah learning day after day having been through the fires of hell? How did he have such patience for me? Why did I always want to just hug this diminutive man every time I saw him in Shul?

The single quality that remained into his old age was his purity of spirit and his sweetness. Many at the funeral lauded his encyclopedic knowledge and esoteric '*drushim*' however for me his endearing quality was this unconditional love for his fellow man.

We had a dog, (Gilbert) when living on Jarlath, a few doors down and, on coming to visit us for the first time, he heard our beloved Springer

Spaniel barking. He was taken aback, shaken, when he told us of his experience hiding from the Nazis. They had come to take his family away. He hid from them by climbing up the chimney, hiding there by holding onto a rope. The German Shepherds smelled him in the flue and alerted their masters who saw on checking, only blackness. His fear of dogs originated there when he last saw his family being deported.

Once in the Daf Yomi I came late, to hear a heated discussion between Reb Yisroel and Reb Izzy Stark about the few weeks before Hungarian Jewry's deportation and whether they might have been saved. This was delaying the class, but the Rabbi motioned to me with his finger over his lips, as if to say "these survivors must be allowed to vent, even after 70 years the past haunts them, it is therapeutic for them so we will just wait".

One Tisha B'av, I heard him davening with fervor and went up to him and exclaimed "after what you went through, how can you even say these words like "Hashem save us" there was no one there to save your family from the Nazis! Where do you find such faith?"

He replied "What do you expect? I grew up in Pressburg in a cheder where the Rebbe indoctrinated us to be prepared to give our lives *alst Kiddush Hashem!* I was only fulfilling our duty as *yidden!*" Those words pierced my heart as I saw in the living flesh what Emunah looks like. Nothing had prepared me for such an answer. He was genetically programmed for *mesiras nefesh!* It was a natural response to catastrophe for a *yid!*

He came to our home for shabbes dinner a few months ago in a wheelchair. Even then at 94 he was still interested in finding a shidduch for my daughter, such was his concern for the next generation of *yidden.* He played with my grandchildren, trying to make them laugh by rotating

his dentures! He just wanted to interact with everyone. He sat a long time with my *shviger* and talked in Torah. He retained his sweetness.

Every Sunday I would place two bagels on his door. Living alone was hard for him, especially after his last hospital discharge. If the door was open, I would enter and sit and listen once again to his *Toirah*. Often I did not understand his long convoluted *drushim*, but over the years I realized that what I was listening to was more than the stream of consciousness, more than his particular *midrashic* way of approaching the Chumash: it was my connection with a lost generation, a generation that will never return; that I was listening to the stream of Rabbinic thought pouring out of his *maiyan*, a veritable "*nachal novea mekor chochma*"; that he was a final product of this Oberlander/Pressburger type of *drush*; that I would probably never hear such Torah again, and that was worth listening to, as if to a precious piece of music, the prosidy, the harmonics, the intonation, even if I did not understand his particular hermeneutic.

The last Sunday I went to his house, shaken by the presence of the previous Sundays' bagel, and realizing he was no longer in his home.

I realized he was institutionalized and that I was no longer *zoche* to bring him his beloved bagels. No longer able to spend private time with this prince of a man.

He was a mentor to me, his sweetness his loving nature, his impish smile and his readiness to listen to me at all times, my heart is broken, my dear friend Mr. Farkas.