

***Hesped* for my revered father in law Harav Emanuel Gettinger**

**Delivered at Young Israel of the West Side Manhattan 3.8.15**



Through winter-time we call on spring,  
And through the spring on summer call,  
And when abounding hedges ring  
Declare that winter's best of all;  
And after that there s nothing good  
Because the spring-time has not come -  
Nor know that what disturbs our blood  
Is but its longing for the tomb

William Butler Yeats <sup>1</sup>

We thank you all for coming and sharing this precious moment with us  
Those who came from near and far (like my nephew Rabbi Aaron Gettinger from Los Angeles)  
Each and everyone of you was touched by this man  
And in this moment we are all one

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<sup>1</sup> This is life as pure death wish, there is here a sense in which Yeats is correct...what we seek is a meaning for our ceaseless anxious anticipatory actions, and death is part of that meaning. Any life that does not take account of death, that does not hear the annihilating silence inside every sound, the nullifying stillness within every action, is a life that can neither harness nor address the dark energy, a life already possessed by death. Yeat's mistake in this poem however is to make death the entire meaning of life. My father in law was able to hold both the light and dark energy. His silence in the last 15 months reflected this anticipation.

In our grief  
And in our celebration of this life-  
A life greater than life  
A person larger than most  
A personality rich in its complexity and irony  
A fortitude and strength that carried most of us  
A humility and self-deprecation that inspired us.

(Reggy- oh Reggy you had such a special relationship with him!  
Dr. Lipton, thank you thank you for your medical care and sensitivity to his special needs and your respecting his notions of privacy...  
Aunty Rozzy I promise you Uncle Mecky will be waiting there to welcome him with a joke!)

Where does one begin..  
Where does one have the nerve to summarize, to review, to analyze, to depict  
The full facet of the complexity that went into the personality of my revered father  
in law.

I awoke this morning to a line form Yeats:

Through winter-time we call on spring,  
And through the spring on summer call,  
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Declare that winter's best of all

Abba died a day before spring  
Waiting for *Bein Hashmashos!* After Purim  
His last breath surrendered  
On the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my first breath (Thank you Allan for the comment)  
A day before spring...

His life was spent with the written word...  
His life was teaching and articulating the sacred texts...yet  
His last year was spent in silence....*shtikah*  
*The dignity with which he suffered and died betrayed his nobility of spirit*

His legacy? His written words having taken years and years, of torturous effort  
Years to its birth and publication...*Menach Yoma*  
Betrayed the unspoken...the silence ...*shtikah*  
The space between the words...  
The unanswered questions...  
The white fire on black fire (according to the Zohar)

*Shtikah...*

His life's work...?

Beyond his teaching, his ministry, his *Rabbonus*, his *nesiyus*,

His patriarchy of the family...

Was his struggle with and in *torah she beal peh*

And his unique approach and contribution

And his search for his truth

His understanding of the "truth to its utmost" *emes le-amito*

*Refusing simplistic solutions*

Despite controversy, despite the weight of tradition

The truth must be told, despite...

This courage..

This audacity..

Which came from his mastery of the entire corpus of Talmud and *poskim*

His photographic memory

His active intellect always alert and acutely analyzing

(As Reb Aaron Soloveitchik commented to my Rov, Reb Yehoshua Eichenstein  
"Rav Gettinger and his *chavrusa* were the top minds in Chaim Berlin!")

For me this towering figure in my life,

Was an inspiration in so many ways,

So difficult to highlight..

So difficult to share in public...

But sitting with him through the nights in the ICU

And in the quiet times in our home

Sitting in his silence..*shtikah*

Watching his lips moving in *t'filla* constantly

Now new meaning to the psalmist's "ve-ani t'filloh"

"T'fillah le-David"

"T'fillah le-Ani" has new meaning.

There was much time to reflect on the irony of this man of words

His unique Articulation, his precision, his grammar, his insistence on the

*Pshuto shel davar* the *peshto shel mikra*

His life in its simplicity-not naiveté

Quite the opposite

Spiritual innocence is a state of mind, in which the life of *kedusha*

*And a life in kedusha*

Are not simply viable but the sine qua non of all knowledge and experience.

His clarity

His halachic precision

Now silent..*shtikah*

The irony that the notion of *shkiya...bein Hashmashos*

Should have exercised him so ...  
That grey time..  
That midrashic imaginative time (*erev shabbes bein Hashmashos*) when all sorts of  
weird creatures and things that made no  
Sense in the order of creation (like Bilaam's ass) were created  
That in-between time  
That which is *lo yom velo layla*  
For a man dedicated to precision  
So ironic he should be stretched by this of all *sugyos*  
With *the grey zone of time*...

Other ironies...  
His deep connection with students at secular universities  
His support of women's learning  
His appreciation of the arts and especially music  
His love of astronomy  
And nature...the day before spring

Through winter-time we call on spring,  
And through the spring on summer call,  
And when abounding hedges ring  
Declare that winter's best of all

His openness to critical study methods yet absolute  
Commitment to halachic observance  
His ability to talk to all people in all situations men and women  
And communicate with them  
His charm  
His unique sense of humor that was usually tied to a semantic joke  
His impish laugh

But beyond this  
His mentoring of men and women over the years who stayed connected to him  
As a role model  
As a sage with a profound ability to listen intently  
His counsel

His halachic decisions-*horaa*...always sensitive to the humanity of the situation  
In that delicate balance of what in secular legal circles might be called  
The balance between "law and equity".

Never will you meet a person who more faithfully lived his values  
An essential teacher he gave his students the tools

To study independently  
To think independently  
To think critically  
Never trampling their own values  
He was too humble.

He understood the mysteries  
Despite his claiming on many occasions "*ein lee eiseck benistoros*"  
He would not tolerate my often soft neo-Hassidic Carlebachian interpretations!  
Chastising me with the comment "*stam drush*"!  
*Boy he had my number!*  
Yet he often supported my fascination and study of the Zohar by stating his own  
father did likewise  
And my love of midrashic mind set with the claim Rabbi Riff knew Midrash by heart  
He understood that each person had a particular *netiya* in Torah  
That must be respected  
And nurtured.

More than anything  
His methodology was to invite you the listener into his conversation  
Into his struggle with the *pshat*  
And his sense of a solution  
Inviting you to critique  
Welcoming commentary  
His shiur was a work in progress  
An invitation to participate in his reverence  
For the text and his excitement for the process  
In its playfulness yet holding it accountable to his intellectual rigor.  
And most of all his insistence in the layered and textured strata that lay beneath the  
text.  
The sharper his textual scalpel the greater the treasures he uncovered,

He taught me to see the yam shell *chochma*  
The yam shel Talmud as an even surface  
Yet beneath lay layers upon layers of geological constructions  
And he was going to unpack these layers to lay before all  
The very architecture and phylogeny of the text

**Yet...all the while**  
**Maintaining a reverence for it!**  
**Without disturbing its sacred integrity.**

**Where did he learn to balance these complex worlds?**

**Classical Talmudic study, *sugya* analysis  
And modern techniques of literary critical analysis?**

In the last year or so  
In his silence *shtikah*  
I find myself asking the question more and more  
What would ABBA think?  
What would ABBA say?  
What would ABBA do?  
His character is the foundation of my conscience  
His precision is the foundation of my self-criticism  
His commitment is the foundation of my devotion

I hear his voice  
Reverberating inside when confronted with an ethical issue  
By a comatose patient  
By a halachic decision  
It is of comfort.

His word was his bond  
He never uttered a lie  
He fulfilled every obligation he ever undertook  
He was self-made and self reliant  
His moral conscious saw no disparity between Torah and ethics  
His tears on *tisha b'av* were genuine  
His poetry and *kinnot* broke one's heart..

His ability to *mesameach a chosson and a kalla* was famous  
*His dancing was so dignified, his hands wafting in the air*  
*Gesticulating his warmth and love.*  
Yet simultaneously he would provide a unique and dazzling *dvar toira* in the process  
About how could the children of *beis shammai* marry the children of *beis Hillel*  
If their attribution of the *kalla* was so different!

He was stern at times  
For you children and grandchildren don't expect praise  
It wasn't his style  
He demanded excellence  
And suffered fools not gladly  
When it came to *kavod hatorah* and *kavod* for this *beis hakneses*  
Whether it be Purim or Simchas Torah  
In this illustrious auditorium this sacred sanctuary  
There was no let up when it came to *kedusha*.

His continuing interest in science computers mathematics and astronomy  
His ongoing subscription to specialty magazines in medicine and biology  
His amazing all absorbing mind saw no conflict between these and Torah learning  
His love of Zion and his fierce belief in *Eretz Yisroel*  
His suspicions as to the motives behind religious extremism  
And his embracing of the charedi and non-charedi world  
His respect for the holy young men defending the State of Israel  
The soldiers of ZAHAL.

All these made for his truly being called a *mensch Yisroel*  
*In the Hirschian sense.*

A philosopher he was not nor claimed to be  
He was an interpreter  
Who stuck close to the *pshuto shel mikra*  
Refusing fanciful or pipulistic readings  
Yet at times his reflection was so deep he understood  
The mystery and paradox of life and the divine.  
In truth his insistence on *pshat* was mirrored in the rational cool calm  
Personality he was in life, it was as if his life mirrored his hermeneutics.

He would have made a great physicist it was his dream  
Until the Rosh yeshiva Rav Hutner scolded him "physics *shmysics!*"  
And how better off the Jewish world is for those critical remarks at a critical  
moment in his life. A life devoted to others to people to *yidden* to Klal Yisroel.  
Always humble before those who knew less, never lording his knowledge over the  
poor or ignorant, his respect for all life and the other reflected a genuine aristocratic  
soul.

We are impoverished by his absence in our lives.

In the last few months he would be wheeled into the dining room  
Unable to eat or speak  
He would lip sync the *zemiros*  
Sarah went up to him last week and said, "I always kiss you Abba"  
"You never kiss me!"  
And she put her cheek close to his lips  
And he kissed her.

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**My dearest Abbele**

*Please forgive me*  
*There decisions to be made*  
*About you*

*About your body  
Without your wise counsel  
I had to make...*

*(Reb Dovid Cohen...we spoke at length and struggled together)*

I hope I fulfilled your wishes  
You trained me!  
I tried to intuit your inner desire you and I have gone through this so many times  
over the years  
Who would have thought it would come to this?

*I tried to respect the integrity of your holy body  
Not to be disturbed prodded poked analysed  
The horror of the ICU  
The total invasion of your holy privacy  
The invasion of your sanctity  
But what to do?*

***Please forgive me...***

We brought you home  
(I promised you I would)  
I planted you a fern garden  
You sat outside on the deck  
You sat in the sunlight as the autumn breeze gently crossed your beard  
I held your hand.

Sarah my dear  
Words cannot express your devotion to your father  
You would not wish me to publicize it  
No one did more for him  
No one.

***Abbale..***

*Your silent presence in our home  
Was our greatest gift  
We were honored by your holy presence  
By the gift of your life  
By our being present at the ending  
A day before spring*



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