

## **Eulogy for Rabbi Aaron Landes (z"l) by Rabbi Gerald C. Skolnik**

As President of the Rabbinical Assembly, I participate in today's service with both the sadness that is the inevitable companion of profound loss, and simultaneously with the deep respect born of the appreciation of a life supremely well lived.

Rabbi Aaron Landes, z"l, was a spiritual leader of great distinction, truly one of the great rabbis of his generation. He was, in every way, a commanding rabbinic presence, and he served as a model and a mentor for countless men and women in the pulpit rabbinate. He understood and respected the power of the pulpit as much as any rabbi that I have known, and together with Sora, his invaluable and precious life's partner, he fashioned a rabbinate that helped make this synagogue the venerable institution that it is. To be in his presence was to feel that power, which was always coupled with the deep sense of humanity and compassion that made him a treasured pastor to so many congregants through the years.

As a Rear Admiral in the United States Naval Reserve, where he served his country with distinction for thirty-four years, Rabbi Landes blazed a path for others to follow. As we speak, my own son-in-law, who is currently on active duty as a Navy Chaplain posted to Marine battalion in Okinawa, is the direct beneficiary of Rabbi Landes' outstanding work. He is, both literally and figuratively, walking in Aaron's path. Aaron showed generations of colleagues both the immeasurable value of serving our country, and also the critically important work that military chaplains do for those of all religions who are far from home and family. With apologies to the esteemed Navy officers who are all attired in their dress uniforms here today, *no one* looked better in dress Navy blues than Aaron Landes, and again- his was a commanding presence.

But all of this great professional accomplishment was, to my eyes, secondary in his life to the remarkably strong and powerful connection that Rabbi Landes enjoyed with his family. As a loving and devoted husband to Sora, an adoring and equally devoted father to Rena, Rebecca, Joshua and Tamar, and ultimately to their spouses who became his children, and their children as well, Aaron was a consummate family man. All you had to do was see him in their presence, and the love that he shared with them and which they returned in equal if not greater measure, and it was plain to see of what I speak.

I once had a chance encounter with Aaron at, of all places, the food court at Woodbury Commons, near where he and Sora had a vacation home. I remember our conversation clearly. I told him that I would consider myself a fortunate man, and rabbi, indeed, if I was able to create for myself the loving family that he had, given the enormous pressures of the pulpit rabbinate. He put his very large hand- he was a big man, and his hand was like a bear claw- he put his very large hand on my shoulder, looked me straight in the eye as if I were the only person in the

world, and told me that his family always was his highest priority. If one of his children called, he said that even if he was in a meeting and he couldn't talk with them, he would always take the call, say he'd get back, and tell them he loved them. He said it with great pride, and I never doubted that he meant every word of it.

I would be remiss if I did not add this personal note. I was privileged to have Sora's beloved parents, Azriel and Rose Eisenberg, z"l, as congregants and precious friends over many years in my home congregation in Forest Hills. Aaron and Sora and their steadily expanding family spent many wonderful Shabbatot and Chagim in our shul, and to have known Azriel and Rose was to understand and appreciate Sora, because she came from the very best stock. Azriel once told me, in characteristically honest Azriel fashion, that he didn't much care for rabbis- actually, he said it more strongly than that- but he loved Aaron, and he liked me. I was, and still am, deeply flattered.

Each and every member of the Rabbinical Assembly is precious to us, and no one appreciates more than his/her colleagues the nature of a rabbi's burden, and the awesome responsibilities that he bears. On all counts both personal and professional, Rabbi Aaron Landes excelled. His rabbinate brought Torah to countless Jews, and his love of those he served made *him* loved and universally respected. On behalf of my colleagues, I offer my heartfelt condolences to all the members of the family, and offer the prayer that his memory- as I know it will- will always be source of blessing. *Y'heh zichro baruch!*