

We are gathered today to pay our final respects to Mrs. Audrey Nutovitch, Chaya Fraida bas Yaakov.

I didn't have the zchus to know Mrs. Nutovich personally. But I did have a chance to hear about her from her beloved son, our esteemed chaver Melchior. Even from that conversation, just since her petirah, her sterling character shone through. I can only imagine how much more favorably impressed I would have been had I been able to witness her ways firsthand.

Mrs. Nutovitch did not have an easy life. She was born to a pious, respected family in Sighet (Romania/Hungary). As a teenager, she endured the horrors of the holocaust. After the war, she hoped to return to her hometown and live in peace. But to add insult to injury, Sighet was soon under the rule of communist Romania where religion, especially Judaism, was persecuted. Nevertheless, she persevered with incredible strength--she married and had a child. Not simply to build a family, but to build up the Jewish people. She engaged a melamed for her son under the communist regime at great personal risk to ensure that he had the fundamentals of Jewish education.

With the unbearable oppression continuing, the Nutovitches were finally able to escape Europe. At an advanced age, they chose to begin a new life here in America where they could express their Judaism fully.

Successfully overcoming these hurdles required great strength of character. Mrs. Nutovitch was known in her family for both physical and emotional strength--she was the one they could count on to help with tasks and to lend a listening ear. Although she was the first to offer help to others, she was fiercely independent. She refused to have anyone else assist her unless it was absolutely impossible to do it herself. Even in her final days, when she hesitatingly entered a nursing home, anything she could do herself, she did.

More than people were impressed with her strength, they were also floored by her exceptionally good heart. She treated all people, Jewish or not, with utmost respect. Melchior recalls how she would even insist that his nannies eat their meals with the family and not separately. She gave of her time and effort to Tzedaka, often asking her son to help her bring home-cooked meals to a homeless shelter.

While this may sound taxing, it was simply second nature to her. It wasn't that she was constantly prodding herself to do these things and sometimes she slipped. She lived and breathed אהבת ישראל and אהבת הבריות. But her kindness and goodness was not haphazard either--all her deeds very done deliberately, with care and consideration, to an extent that is difficult to relate in words.

Above all, Mrs. Nutovitch's was devoted to her family. She was a true אשת חיל to her late husband. Despite his serious heart problems and many hospitalizations, he managed to live much longer than any doctor predicted. After her husband's death, his doctor wrote to her that he thinks that Mr. Nutovitch owed his relative longevity to his wife's totally dedicated care.

Melchior credits his mother with giving him a truly exceptional upbringing, which he appreciates all the more now as an adult. Despite all she suffered, she was determined to instill in him with as much kindness and goodness as she could. Melchior, your kindness and pleasant ways, and your Yiddishe neshama, are a true testament to your mother's memory. May you have the strength to carry her legacy with you until 120 years and beyond.

Although Mrs. Nutovitch no longer lives among us, she remains alive in our hearts as long as she serves as an inspiration for us to ingrain within ourselves as second nature to act, naturally and automatically, in a manner that is pleasing to God as well as our fellow people.

יהא זכרה ברוך