

Eulogy for Martin Spier ל"ט

When I went to visit Martin at home a few weeks ago, there was one phrase that really struck me, which he kept repeating over and over at various points in our conversation: "Life is what you make of it." In the course of our lives, many things might not go our way; it is our reaction to the challenges that defines who we are.

Indeed, Martin underwent many tribulations in his life. He was born in Holzhausen, Germany, the fourth of five siblings, and grew up in the terrible years of the 1930s. When Jews were expelled from the local schools, he had to travel to faraway Frankfurt, away from his family, to attend school. He spent the war years themselves enduring unspeakable horrors in several concentration camps.

Yet, Martin did not let these terrible experiences defeat him. He regarded the year 1946, when he moved to America, as the year his life truly began. And what did he make of this new beginning? He married his beloved wife Monica, established a successful career as a painter, and raised a beautiful Jewish family.

But when thinking about what Martin made of his life, there is something that stands out even more than his concrete accomplishments: his stellar character. Simply put, Martin was the paradigm of a kind and good-hearted person. He greeted everyone with a smile and was always ready to help (he offered me assistance several times, unprovoked, for anything I needed for the shul or otherwise). He never bore a grudge and only saw the good in others. And the feeling was mutual: I never heard or heard of a bad word said about him, and I don't believe one ever was.

Yesterday, I happened to mention the sad news to a couple of people who occasionally attend our shul. To be honest, I wasn't expecting much of a reaction from them other than "sorry to hear that." But their actual reactions took me by surprise. In a quite heartfelt manner, they said, "Oh, that is so sad. He was really such a nice man. I'll miss him." And meanwhile I'm thinking, "I wasn't aware you ever even spoke with him." But you see what an impact he made on others in his humble way.

On the day of Martin's death, I went with a few shul members to check on Mrs. Spier. Naturally, she reminisced a bit about her husband's life and what a wonderful person he was. At one point, she was quick to add "I'm not just saying this because people say nice things about others after they pass away. Everything is exactly as I would have described it in his lifetime." Of course, she didn't need to convince us. None of us thought for a moment otherwise! He was

the kind of person where exaggeration of their attributes is unwarranted because it is simply unnecessary!

During the last few, difficult weeks, Martin was not his usual outgoing self, but he retained every bit of his positive outlook. He never complained, and greeted those who came to visit with kind words. He was fortunate to have been surrounded with those who loved him best: first and foremost, Monica, his wife of 58 years, whose devotion knew no bounds. His daughters, Audrey and Jennifer and their husbands, Neil and Sal, were constantly by his side. His grandchildren came from near and far, even flying across the country—such was the love and respect they felt for their Opa, which was reflected in the nachas he got from them. Also, his brother Walter and his wife Karla and their family, with whom he shared a special bond throughout his experiences and as dual pillars of the Washington Heights community. I would also like to single out the impressive dedication of his very special aides.

We will all miss him—his family, his friends, and I would add the children who loved him, and not just for providing them with candy in shul. We can honor his memory by remembering that life is what you make of it, and doing our best to emulate him by making it a good one, a sweet one, one as pleasing to God and to man as Martin's.

יהי זכרו ברוך

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