

For My Dear Friend Martin A”H

We are here to remember Martin and to offer words of comfort to his family. But, how do I offer comfort when I am in need of comfort? Martin was not just one of my congregants, he was my good friend. I was privileged to serve a congregation blessed with many heroes of the 20th century. A number of who became father figures for me and helped guide me in ways that I will always be grateful I for.

A number of years ago a famous TV anchorman, Tom Brokaw, wrote a book entitled, The Greatest Generation, in which he detailed the heroism of the World War II generation, who after experiencing the horrors of the war went on to build the US into a great nation. I do not want to minimize the greatness of the accomplishments of these people one bit. But, we know about an even greater generation, the survivors of the Holocaust. The horrors they faced were unspeakable. Yet, after surviving the threat of death at every moment in concentration camps, death camps and on death marchers, over what seemed an eternity, many miraculously came out the other end of that hell with an indomitable spirit.

These people were much like the very first generation of Jews in the desert. In the Torah portions we have read over the past few weeks we have seen the generation that left Egypt rise to the spiritual heights of perceiving G-d, as they stood at Mt. Sinai, only to fall to the depths, with the sin of the golden calf and then to climb out of the abyss with the building of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle. At the time of the sin of the golden calf it appeared as if all was lost and G-d would have to start over again with a new people. But, that is not what happened. These very people found a way to rebuild anew and set the standard for all generations of Jews to come. Historically, there have never been a people who have rebuilt themselves as many times as have the Jewish people.

Martin was one of the last remaining survivors of the Holocaust who graced the Washington Heights Congregation.

Martin came through the experience with his faith in Hashem intact and with a desire to go on with life at a time when no one could have faulted him for having neither faith nor desire. He came to the US and pursued his “Eshet Chayil”, his beloved Monica, and began life anew. He sent his children to Yeshiva in order to insure they would grow up to be proud Jews and then worked hard to instill the next generation with that same pride. He worked long and hard to provide Monica and the children with a good life. His work as a house painter and painting contractor was not easy but he managed to build it into a successful business.

Martin was a very generous individual who was always at the ready to help others and share his good fortune. He and Monica gave generously to the Shul and many other organizations both in

the US and Israel. Like the other members of his generation he played an important role in the rebuilding of the Jewish people to heights no one could have imagined during those dark days of the Holocaust.

He was a true lover of Medinat Yisrael, the State of Israel. He would often reminisce, nostalgically, about the time he almost made Aliya with Monica and the girls. His and Monica's generosity to causes in Israel will serve as a lasting memorial.

The past 6 years have not been easy for Martin and all of us who love him. A surgery that was to have improved his quality of life nearly ended it and left him with tremendous challenges. But, miraculously, with the help of a loving family and good friends, that indomitable spirit returned. Despite his disability, he returned to Shul and with great effort made his way into a building, that was not in the least handicapped accessible, with pride and dignity. He was there for Monica during her health problems. He was there for his children and grand-children. He was there to participate in the wedding of his grandson, whom he was most proud of and he was there for all his friends and fellow congregants with his warm smile and firm handshake.

For Leah and me, one of the things we eagerly anticipated on our visits to the US was the time we would spend with Martin and Monica. While we stayed in contact with telephone calls, Martin was not a man of many words on the phone. However, face to face things were very different. We could talk about his life, current events, family and what he and Monica were considering for their next Tzedakah project. Martin took a deep interest in our son, Yossie. He always wanted to know how he and his family were doing in Israel and if there was any way he could help them.

Martin, I pledge to keep your stories and lessons about life with me forever. I will not quickly forget the sound of your voice and the oft repeated phrase, "What can you do? You have to make the best of things." and "Rabbi what can we do for you? Please don't hesitate to ask. We are always there for you."

Martin, you will always be there for us in the hearts and minds of a loving family and grateful friends. It was our honor and great benefit to have known you and to have shared in a life well lived.

תהא נשמתו צורה בצרור החיים

Rabbi Ellis Bloch
Rabbi Emertis, Washington Heights Congregation

Delivered 28 Adar 5777 (March 26, 2017)