

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

President, Yeshiva University

The shock has not yet worn off and probably will not for a long time. And yet we already feel the deep sense of personal loss: that the Jewish community has lost a faithful and competent and wonderful servant, and I personally have lost a friend whose loyalty was total, whose friendship and concern were a source of great encouragement for me for many years.

To think of Rabbi Steven Dworken, is immediately to have a smile across your lips, in expectation and appreciation of this man of ne'im halichot, pleasantness, warmth, softness, humility, and grace. Whenever he called, I made sure to answer immediately, not necessarily because of the content of the call that I expected, but because Steve Dworken was a man who was so attractive in his personality; so fine, that I thought there was a pleasure, simply being with him on the phone. He was a man who was beautiful of face, beautiful of manner, beautiful as a husband, father and grandfather, with a beautiful heart, and a beautiful neshama.

He came from Boston. He never lost that charming accent that was so very Bostonian. He grew up in Maimonides Day School under the tutelage and the leadership of the Rav, רצ"ל, was a rabbi in a number of communities - in Stamford Connecticut, in Portland Maine, in Linden New Jersey where he was very attached to his people. And then he became the Assistant Director of Yeshiva's Division of Communal Services; he was in charge of Rabbinic Placement. He loved rabbis. He was a moker rabbanan. And he dealt with them, not in an official manner only, but he dealt with them personally. And he managed to compromise, or to resolve the paradox of - on the one hand being loyal to the institution - and on the other, considering the personal needs of individual rabbanim.

And then he became Executive Vice President of Histadrus Harabonim, the Rabbinical Council of America, and he grew and matured into the position of RCA, with great responsibility, and a great sense of that responsibility, for the needs of Torah, for Orthodox Jewry, for all Jews.

The Gemara says that echad min hachabura shemes, yidagu kol beney hachabura (Shabbat 106a). "If one of a group that is knit together passes away, all the others should be concerned." Yidagu, "should worry". Normally we say that is because they are exposed suddenly to the stark reality of mortality, and each one is concerned for himself. But I think there is another reason too; that echad min hachabura shemet, yidagu kol beney hachabura, because they realize that there is a gaping hole in the chabura; that something very real and genuine has passed away. You can replace a man's functions. Other people will come who will be able to perform the functions of the one who is missing. But there is only one person who looked at the world with his own two eyes. Never before was there such a person.



Never again will there be such a person to comprehend and perceive the world in those ways.

Rabbi Dworken was a man who was sweet, soft spoken, humble, intelligent, rational and always helpful. He had a marvelous capacity, not only to make us feel good, but to imitate him in being good, in being like him.

Chasidim say that a chasid once asked the Chidushei Harim, the great Gerer Rebbe, "I don't understand the very first mishna of the Mishnayos of Berachot, which asks me'eimasai korin es hashema, "From what time are you allowed to read the Shema Yisrael", and the Mishna answers besha'a shehakohanim ochlim et terumatan, "when the Kohanim begin to eat their teruma, the tithe of wheat that they had received. So the man said to the Rebbe: Es is a pele - "It is remarkable. Why should the Mishna make something so spiritual, so ruchni, depend on something so gashmi, so material and mundane as eating food. And the Chidushei Harim answered, "There is no pele, there is no kashya, there is no surprise. Because the Ribono Shel Olam can measure a person's ruchniyus by the way he conducts his gashmiyus. The Ribono Shel Olam can tell what type of ruchniyus you have, your "spiritual temperature", as it were, by the way you eat and drink and conduct your mundane affairs.

Rabbi Dworken dealt with many mundane matters, as all of us must, in positions of communal responsibility. But he viewed all of it through the prism of his unique and special ruchniyus. He saw the world through that ruchniyus. And thus he was able to bring out the best in all of us. Because, somehow, without even using words, he appealed to what Abraham Lincoln called, "the better angels of our nature". He brought out the best in us.

He had a heart attack many years ago and at that time the doctors had given up hope, and then despite their lack of confidence and hope, he recovered, and he was with us for a number of years. He then made up his mind, as he said, that he would make use of every single day. Because every day that he is alive is a special gift from the Ribono Shel Olam. And indeed he did, every single day.

A wit once said, about someone else, when asked, "When did he die", and he answered, "When he stopped living". He thought it was facetious, but it isn't. The Kotzker Rebbe once said, "I have often met people who were long dead and didn't realize it". What we call "life" and "death" are qualitative as well as quantitative and chronological matters. If you will live every day with the awareness that it is a gift of the Ribono Shel Olam,

when you are truly "alive" every day that you are alive, then you have to be a person who knows that each of us has a shlichus, has a special mission in life. Unfortunately, some people don't believe it, some people don't know it, and some people look for it and can't find it. The fortunate few however, know they have a shlichus and look for it and practice it. And ashreyhem. How lucky they are. Rabbi Dworken died when he stopped living; not a moment sooner. His life had many interesting facets. But above all was the consciousness of a mission, a shlichut, to do good for Am Yisrael, to fulfill the purposes of Torah, and do all he could for fellow rabbanim, especially for Talmidei Chachamim.

To his family I would say this:

He died in this period between Parshat Bo and Parshat Beshalach. The names themselves are quite interesting. We will read this Shabbos, Vayehi beshalach Paroh es haam, "It was when Pharaoh sent away the people out of Egypt". And one commentator asks, why does it say vayehi when the Gemara says vayehi is lashon tzara, vehaya is lashon simcha. What was the tzara of going out of Egypt? He said the tzara was vayehi beshalach Paroh, they didn't come of their own accord, but had to be sent away by Paroh.

Contrast that with the first words of this past week's sidra. The Ribono Shel Olam said to Moshe, bo el Paroh. Come to Paroh; not "go to Paroh". But "come", "I am with you. Come along with me. You will always be with me when you confront the Parohs of life".

To his wife, to Susan, who has lost the most precious asset of her life, to her daughters Nomi and Aliza, to Arye, their son, and to the grandchildren, Know in your tzaar, know that your father, husband, grandfather, leaves the world not because he was sent away, but because - as it were - the Ribono Shel Olam took him by his hand, and said "Come with Me. Come with Me". And the rest of us will understand that we have had the privilege of a gift for these last years that he was with us, in which he lived every day in a mussar haskel to all of us, to live every day to the fullest. Teheh nishmaso tzerura bitzeror hachayim.

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

When Yaakov Avinu went down to Mitzrayim he was very nervous, and HaKadosh Baruch Hu told him, "Don't worry,