

EULOGY

FOR

DR. HYMAN B. GRINSTEIN

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DR. NORMAN LAMM

I was only 18 years old when I first met Dr. Grinstein some 37 years ago, when I was a freshman student in his Yeshiva College Jewish history class. I was intrigued by this handsome man who spoke with a Southern drawl at a time when most others had an East European accent, a man who had the mind of a scholar and the heart of a poet combined with the trust of a child.

I knew him in many roles. At first, he was my teacher, then my congregant, then a member of my faculty -- but above all, he was a dear friend. He was a guest at our home very often for Shabbat, for holidays, for the Passover Sedarim. He was beloved by all members of the family, and especially by our young children.

He was a man who was utterly devoted to friends, to students, to colleagues. Most of all, he was devoted to Yeshiva University. Born in Texas and raised there in his early years, his family took him to Israel and then back to New York. He came to our institution first as a secretary to Dr. Bernard Revel, the first President of Yeshiva. Dr. Pinchas Churgin then took him as Registrar of the Teachers Institute, where he later became its Director. He was professor of Jewish history at Yeshiva College and at the Bernard Revel Graduate School, and at the end of his days was the University archivist.

He never considered his work at Yeshiva a mere job. We were his family, and we thus became his emotional locus as well. The Sages derived the principle that Torah can endure only when one is willing to give his life for it, from the verse Zot ha-Torah

adam ki yamut ba-ohel, "this is the law (Torah): if a man will die in his tent..." The verse speaks not only of Torah if a man is willing to die, but dying in a "tent" or home. In order for Torah to survive it is necessary not only that we be willing to sacrifice for it, but that we study it in an ambience and environment that make of our study not an isolated intellectual endeavor but a total experience which engages the affective aspects of life as well. Without the Ohel or home, Torah remains only intellectual gymnastics, not a teaching of life.

Hyman B. Grinstein was an outstanding historian of Jewish life in New York City, and wrote its definitive history in 1945 when he published, The Rise of the Jewish Community in New York. He later published as well a two-volume text on Jewish History in general. He had a superb collection of original monographs and lithographs pertaining to immigrant Jewish life in New York which he gathered with great love and careful attention to detail. In addition to his scholarship, Dr. Grinstein also had a mystic dimension to his personality. In his later years he began to study Zohar, and referred to it often. He had a vivid imagination and the soul of a poet. Years and decades before The Chariot of the Gods was published, before it was even conceived, Dr. Grinstein back in the 1940's was talking about flying saucers and extraterrestrial life, and attempting to interpret Ezekiel's vision of the divine chariot as a visit of interplanetary travelers. The correctness of this interpretation is irrelevant; what is important is that he was a man with a flair in his soul and a lilt

to his spirit. Perhaps it is for this reason that he was so enamored of the American Jewish personality, Mordecai Emanuel Noah, who was the earliest proto-Zionist in this country when he attempted to build a Jewish State on an island off Buffalo in the early days of this Republic. It is perhaps part of the same childlike streak that made him enjoy ceremonials. For many years he was Chief Marshal at Yeshiva's commencement exercises, and very much enjoyed his work on the Committee for Ceremonial Occasions.

Far greater in importance was the fact that Dr. Grinstein possessed a lev tov, a good heart. He was what the Sages referred to as an adam kasher, a right thinking and decent human being, a man of integrity. He was totally without arrogance and superciliousness. Modest, humble, he was a tzanu'a in all his ways. If he had a fault, it was his overindulgence of his students. He loved them, he was paternal and even maternal to them, and they knew that if they tried hard enough they could get him to act even more charitably than he should. In a sense, he spoiled them -- and generations of us bless him for it.

Dr. Grinstein was an enormously charitable man. Having been his Rabbi in two different congregations, I can testify that there never was an occasion when an appeal for funds was made that Dr. Grinstein did not give most generously -- indeed, for a man of his means, he was probably the most philanthropic man I ever met.

His charitableness extended itself not only to money matters, but to the area of human sensitivity. He never spoke ill of another person, never gossiped. He had enormous sensitivity to the needs, fear, worries, and concerns of others.

These noble traits were not a mere conglomeration of fortuitous congenital characteristics. They were part of an integrated personality of a man who had deep faith. He was a genuinely religious person. Indeed, I used to joke with him about his middle name, "Bogomolny," and he once explained to me that that was Russian for, "a servant of God," an eved ha-Shem.

He never married, yet, in addition to his two nephews who are here, we are all his relatives. In the words of the Talmud, Hakham she'met ha-kol kerovav, "a wise man who dies, all are his relatives." All of us are gathered here today as mourners in deep sadness over his passing, and as family who thank the Almighty for having given him to us for as long as He did.

After the cataclysm of the Golden Calf and the subsequent devastation of the hosts of Israel, the Lord said to Moses, lekh aleh mi-zeh, "go and rise up from here." After Dr. Grinstein's long and devastating illness, our Father in Heaven called out to him and said to him too, lekh aleh mi-zeh: the time has come to go, ascend, and leave your earthly home.

That he has done, and we shall miss him sorely.