

Eulogy for Rabbi Emanuel Rackman

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By Haskel Lookstein

In keeping with the straight forward nature of Rabbi Rackman, of blessed memory, and his penchant for organization and time-consciousness, I guess that I should inform you that, after six beautiful eulogies, I am the final speaker. In keeping with the standards of Rabbi Rackman, I will try very hard to be brief.

The weekly portion which we will read this Shabbat begins with the description of Jacob's leaving Beersheva and going to Haran. Rashi, famously, quotes our Rabbis in asking why it was necessary for the Torah to use the word *vayetze* – “and he left”. Of course, he left Beersheva; that's where he was living. It would have been enough for the Torah to have said simply *vayelech charana* – “he went to Haran”, where his uncle Labin was living.

The answer to the question, of course, is that *yeti'at tzaddik min ha-makom osah roshem* – the leaving of a *tzaddik* from a place makes an impression; for as long as the *tzaddik* is in a place he is its hod – glory, he is its ziv – beauty – he is its hadar – magnificence. When he leaves that place some of the glory, the beauty and the magnificence leaves with him.

The three descriptive nouns cited by Rashi: *hod*, *ziv* and *hadar*, suggest three critical areas in which Rabbi Rackman made a huge impact on our world, an impact which is inevitably diminished by his passing.

First, he was the glory of the rabbinate, a model of what a rabbi ought to be – an *eved l'avdei Hashem*, a servant to the servants of the Lord. He lived a life of indefatigable service to his flock and to the Jewish world. He worked 24/7, just like an *eved* – a slave – works. No task was too menial for him to undertake; no challenge too intimidating for him to strive to meet.

He had a capacity for boundless self-sacrifice. He had no fear of ridicule for publicly taking on the tough issues. I remember him calling me frantically to come to a Rabbinical Council of America executive committee meeting in order to defend a colleague against what he considered unwarranted efforts to apply sanctions or possibly to expel him. I, of course, came and sat next to him as he defended that colleague and pleaded with the members of the executive committee to reserve judgment and to practice tolerance. No one could challenge Rabbi Rackman's integrity and passion for fairness and justice. Needless to say, he stopped the entire effort in its tracks.

Hu hodah – he was the glory of the Modern Orthodox Rabbinate.

He was also *zivah* – his was the beauty of the public personality who was nevertheless, committed first and foremost to his family, to his devoted, brilliant and

aristocratic Ruth, of blessed memory, who was his partner and colleague in every facet of life and to whom he was incredibly devoted.

To his sons and daughters-in-law in whom he took such pride and for whom he expressed such concern. I believe that one of things that drove him late in life to take on the very complicated cause of the *aguna* was the fact that his daughter-in-law, Honey, of blessed memory, was so deeply involved in that cause. He felt he had to do something to relieve the plight of the *aguna* even though his efforts brought him much criticism and opposition.

He was an adoring grandfather as you have already heard. He was a loving brother-in-law to my aunt and uncle and very devoted to their children. He and my father, Rabbi Rackman used to say, “had a brother-in-law in common, but not a common brother-in-law.

I recall his delivering the sermon at my Bar Mitzvah in March of 1945 wearing his Air-Force Chaplin’s uniform. What an impressive sight!

Hu zivah – his family commitment was a thing of beauty.

Finally, *hu hadarah* – he was magnificent in his leadership of Bar Ilan University. I know something about the role of President and Chancellor of Bar Ilan from watching my father, of blessed memory, in those roles. Rabbi Rackman took those

responsibilities and raised them exponentially. He gave academic leadership, religious direction and moral and ethical focus to a great university which he made even greater. He also worked day and night to build a sound philanthropic foundation through which to nourish and nurture Bar Ilan's expansion and growth. The builders and supporters of Bar Ilan University became his third congregation. He brought to them the same total devotion which he had brought to the members of Shaare Tefilla in Far Rockaway and to the Fifth Avenue Synagogue.

Hu hadarah – he brought to Bar Ilan magnificence, splendor and unparalleled excellence.

As he leaves our world, some of the glory of the Modern Orthodox rabbinate, some of the beauty of the Rackman family, and some of the magnificence of his service to Bar Ilan and the community are diminished. This is inevitable in the passing of a modern day patriarch. But his powerful contributions in each of these three spheres guarantee that his family, his beloved Bar Ilan and all of his disciples and colleagues in the rabbinate will continue to flourish and to thrive because of his life's work.

He was Menachem in life – a source of *nechama*, comfort, consolation and inspiration. May his family and his community continue to be comforted and inspired as he goes to his eternal rest in his beloved *Medinat Yisrael*.

May his soul be forever bound up among the living.