

Yom Kippur 2022

Some people may wonder how rabbis come up with what they say at a funeral. After all, there is usually very limited time to prepare and, in many cases, this rabbi may not have had a personal relationship with the person who has passed away.

Now I can't speak for all rabbis, but this rabbi tries to find the Torah, the unique lessons that this individual has taught us through the life that they led. I listen carefully when speaking with the family, trying to glean what themes seem to be coming through and I attempt to distill those lessons so that *Zecher Tzadik Livracha*, so that the memory of our righteous loved ones can continue to serve as a blessing.

So it might come as no surprise that a few weeks back, I couldn't help but wonder, what would my eulogy for Queen Elizabeth II be? If given the opportunity, what Torah should we be learning from her life?

Now I never had the chance to meet the Queen, though I know a number of you have during royal visits to Ottawa. I did, however, have the opportunity just this past August to swear allegiance to her and her successors as part of our family's citizenship ceremony. Our family felt so honoured that we were able to do this during her life time. Staci, in fact, grew concerned that something might happen to her before the date of our ceremony. Even during the ceremony, checking to make sure she was okay, for fear that our oath would need to change.

Interestingly, however, this is not the first time my family had the opportunity to engage with Queen Elizabeth. My father shared with me, that when he was in grade 3, he decided to write a letter to all of the world leaders to ask them what their jobs were like. He wrote the President of the United States, the Pope, and more, including the fairly newly crowned Queen of England. From just about every world leader, he received no response. And then, one day, a single letter arrived in the mail. It was in a heavy vellum envelope with no stamp or return address. An

embossed royal seal on the back flap. Apparently, something with an embossed royal seal requires no stamp.

Upon opening the letter, he discovered a note from one of the Queen's ladies in waiting that said something to the effect of, "it is not her majesty's practice to comment on the monarchy..."

I cannot think of a better representation of Queen Elizabeth's reign than this letter. The letter is certainly emblematic of the stoicism of the monarchy as well as the Queen's disinterest in engaging in questions about it. But perhaps the piece of this letter that best reflects who this Queen was is the very fact that she assured that a letter was sent back to this third grader living in Burbank, California. No other world leader could be bothered to send a response. This one did.

Queen Elizabeth II was someone who wanted to be present, a fact that is all too rare in the history of monarchical life through the centuries. The amount of events she attended and people she met over more than 70 years is truly remarkable. She first got her corgis so that she could have a relatable topic to discuss with people. And as been famously shared in recent weeks from the Jewish community, stayed and listened to every holocaust survivor's story when they were at an event with her a number of years back.

And that doesn't even touch on the sense of permanence and presence that arose through her more than 7 decades as Queen. When someone has been around your whole life, you feel like they will always be there. If one thing was always true, in a constantly changing world, it was that Queen Elizabeth was here as the head of our Commonwealth.

So how can we honour her legacy? How can we assure that the memory of the righteous remains a blessing for many years to come?

There can be no greater and perhaps more important lesson from the Queen's 96 years than the need to be present for one another, a lesson that has become all the more important over the past few years. Even before the pandemic, the challenge of greater distancing and increased loneliness was on the rise. Throw in 2 years of physical distancing and the inability to be truly together and we have the challenging moment that we find ourselves in.

Some of us here may be royalists while others not. Some of us may know every last detail about the royal family, while others may not be able to name all of the Queen's grandchildren. But no matter our feelings regarding the monarchy, there are lessons that we can learn from her life. Ways that we can be inspired to do better because of the example that she set for us.

But today is not only or even primarily about remembering Queen Elizabeth of blessed memory. Today, we all gather to remember our own cherished family members and friends who have gone to their eternal homes. But, independent of the Yizkor service's name, it has never been designed as purely a time to remember. The remembering is designed to lead us to action. To engage in mitzvot, to ensure that our loved one's memory continues as a blessing.

Now the most common way expressed to do this task is to donate to tzedakah in their memory. Supporting causes that were important to them, continues their legacy. This past year, our synagogue was the beneficiary of this tzedakah as we were able to create Jackie's Corner as part of our Malka Pass Library. This special section at the entrance to the library allows us to carry forward Jackie Gorenstein's love of shul and love of books. Carrying her memory and legacy forward in a meaningful way.

But what if we take our time in silence in just a few minutes for really thinking, not just mentioning their names or picturing their faces, but to be thinking to ourselves, what is the Torah that I am meant to learn from their life. What is the core value that I have internalized from having them as part of my own life. And how can I actualize that idea in the days, weeks,

and months ahead. And in that way, not only will I remember them today, but I will remember them every time I engage in actions inspired by their lives.

I am blessed through my work to not only be able to be inspired by the lives lived by my own loved ones, but by the lives led by members of our congregation, their families and friends, whose lives have been shared with me. Every time I work on something related to congregational governance, I think about Abe Feinstein and smile. Every time I read from the Torah, I think of Joe Levitan and smile. Every time I wonder what someone thinks about what's happening at shul, I think of Sheila Nadrach and smile. And every time I greet someone with a big smile, I think of Norman Wolfish and smile a little bigger. These and so many others have left indelible marks on this world and on our lives. And today, not only will we remember them, but we will dedicate ourselves anew to live lives inspired by their memories. Making sure that each and every one of our family, friends, and community members lives continue as a blessing for generations to come.