

March 7, 2005

Dear Devorah, Moshe, David, Esti, Mimi, Yael, Tovi, Ruth, Mordechai, Sharon, Daniel, Dana, Chaya, Shifra, and the great grandchildren, עמ"ש

At first, I thought only to write to those who, by halakha, are the official mourners of Rabbi Glasner זצ"ל. Ultimately, I decided to include all those who made up his world since I came to know him over the past ten years, kininehora, we should all live and be well. When I think of the Rabbi Glasner who welcomed Ronny, עמ"ש my mother עמ"ש and myself into the family, at that time, on the occasion of Sharon עמ"ש and Daniel's עמ"ש vort, and in every interchange thereafter, I call up a man who exuded a welcoming of us with sweetness and kindness in a manner of looking forward hopefully, with good, positive energy.

My images of Rabbi Glasner pull in two directions: the Rabbi Glasner of his physical being, his guf and his history, and to where his history brought him, and the Rabbi Glasner of his spirit, his neshama. Ironically, I think of these images through two actual physical representations. Since I learned of his passing, I remember his physical appearance encased as it were in a coat and scarf and an excessive amount of clothing to protect him from a chill coming from within or without. (Interestingly, the parsha of the Shabbos he died discusses the garments of the Kohanim.) For the second image, I remember the remarkable sweetness of his voice, not only his singing voice which indeed was extraordinary, but also his speaking voice which reached out so pleasantly and entered one's being so delicately, not only from the gracious sentiments he often expressed, but from the very tone of his voice.

Being an in-law myself, I was especially sensitive to the wonderful and sincere love and devotion that Mordechai עמ"ש and Daniel, עמ"ש his grandsons-in-law, showered on Rabbi Glasner, who became to them truly a grandfather. They extended to him every respect; they ran to see him; they hung on his words of Torah, and came away enriched and enlivened by his ideas and insights. They delighted in their exchanges with him; and appreciated each meeting as if it were a gift, which indeed it was. Rabbi Glasner appeared delighted with these young men kininehora, so interested in the family's history and responsive to him, and to Devorah (and she to them), she should live and be well.

The dichotomy between the layered garments and the sweet voice became for me a metaphor of Rabbi Glasner's years in the United States, and in the post WWII years. All I have heard about his many causes and political, religious and social activities speak to me about a man who was out to conquer a new world, trying to use the old tools that had, in Europe, built a world. Rabbi Glasner's strong interest in politics is such an example. I also had to smile when I realized, just since his death, that one could say that in the view of many, the political decisions of his ancestors were, like his own, not always the popular, nor the "politically correct," ones. I have no knowledge about the astuteness of his choices. I think that in regard to two issues about which I've heard over the years: one being the kashrut issue and the other the school education issue in which Rabbi Glasner and Lubavitch worked together, I feel his decisions were on the noble side of the spectrum, and of this I am not surprised.

In my vision of him, Rabbi Glasner was simultaneously someone who revered his ancestors and extolled them, and someone who was interested in and valued each and every Jew in his or her own right, while also enjoying his particular cronies of the European mode. Perhaps because he personally knew and remembered those who occupied formal positions in Europe, he could call up his remembrances in nostalgia and joy, not in suffering. No matter what his circumstances were, those personas could not be taken away from his conscious memory and experiences. The Europe he experienced and lost fortified him.

Similarly, I felt he had a strong regard for the humanity of all people. If he were, because of his ancestry, a member of an elite, he did not come across as someone who was elitist. He always answered my questions forthrightly and sincerely. I think of him as one who wished to stroll freely and with ease in this, his new land, as someone who hoped to achieve and contribute on his own in the prime of his life. His desire alone to wrestle with the problems he identified in Los Angeles is a mark of the man, as was the respectful and devoted manner that I saw him extend to his wife, Devorah.

Every person who knew Rabbi Glasner recognized that he possessed an authentic love and passion for Torah. As his strength would allow, he always had a smart and touching thing to say in learning, something geshmacht, something that would stay in one's mouth like a sweet chocolate, some idea from his father, or Devorah's father, something from the past, but which he imbued with a thought or two of his own.

In his faithfulness to giving over Torah, and in attempting, even in the old, elegant style (and not without humor), to share his ideas, he was very modern indeed, and very brave. What is more is that he gave over the learning in joy, perhaps almost in ecstasy. If one hung on and waited, one had the real pleasure of taking a joy ride with him and disembarking with the enthusiasm of having traveled a wonderful few miles together.

I regret now that I did not bother him more, and call and see him more often. I think he knew I would have liked to; and he always alluded, whenever we spoke, to his own desire for our families to get together more often.

Someone else's story is always a bit one's own story. Perhaps that is the way of human relations. At one point in the year, besides yontifs and special simchas, I consistently phoned to Rabbi Glasner. In fact, my very last attempt to speak to him was on the day before his last procedure in the hospital, when I called, but could not reach him. Rabbi Glasner and I always spoke before the yahrzeit of my father, Tzvi ben Yaakov זצ"ל. My father and Rabbi Glasner's mother shared the same yahrzeit. Being the chassidishist that I am, I never felt, once I learned this fact, that this shared event was coincidental. Rabbi Glasner's response was always the same. He would listen to me tell about my father; he would ask for his name; he would tell me, "I will learn in his memory; our family is really one family," and then we would conclude the conversation by my saying that I would learn in memory of his mother, Miriam Hindl ע"ה "

One could say that Rabbi Glasner experienced much that was bitter during his life, but yet in the sweetness of his voice and his look, there was no bitterness. One could see in him a man who lost the world of Europe, yet in him there was a forward looking quality and an immersion in the world of the present that bespoke a man who lived the majority of his life in the new world. One could see in him a man bounded by the confines of his outer wrappings and the daled amos of his sick room, but yet the words and melody of "Zachor Dovid" were his anthem, and although the times were hard for him, the daled amos he inhabited was the daled amos of Torah which knows no bounds nor boundaries.

Rebbitzin Chana Green, עמ"ש a lovely tzeddekus from Monsey, the wife of Rabbi Moshe Green שליט"א, says that when a good person dies, his qualities float in the air, and our efforts should be spent in trying to grab these qualities to make them our own. How appropriate it is to go after the lishma which characterized Rabbi Glasner's absorption in Torah and mitzvos, and the sweetness of his voice, and the beauty and poignancy of the melodies he loved. May you all take comfort in your memories of him, and in knowing that others, too, remember him with tenderness.

With thoughts,
Joanne