

Dad (Words on behalf of the siblings) [by Shimon Cowen]

Much has been said and is known about how my father treated, and how he was loved by, people. Instead I want to speak about the spiritual dimension and significance of the service of humanity, which was his life. On the face of it, G-d must come into the story of his life, since, our Sages tell us that "with whom people are happy, G-d is happy". G-d was happy with Dad. That's from G-d's perspective. But what about from Dad's perspective? Can Dad's life's work be understood in spiritual terms and did he understand it in spiritual terms?

I remember, as a young teenager, asking him about his spiritual stance. He answered me, "There is one question which I ask myself, and which I cannot answer, and which I only very rarely ask myself, and that is, 'Who am I?'" In 1995 in a newspaper interview, he was a little more explicit. He said, "I am proud of my religious heritage...I find it difficult to believe that there is not some original Creator. What flows from that I don't know. I try to live decently, not because of sanctions of Heaven or Hell but because that's the right way". The diffidence in these words was that of a person, who did not have a strong traditional religious background. Still this person wore the Jewish name "Zelman" with pride through public life. He identified with the plight of the physical and spiritual entity of the Jewish people unequivocally and in perfect tandem with his service of Australia and all humanity.

More than three and a half thousand years ago, our forebear and the forebear of religious humanity, Abraham, experienced the seminal consciousness of the one G-d. In the blaze of this awareness he said before his Creator "I am but dust and ashes". Three and a half-thousand years later, with the intensified haze of 500 years of secularization, I heard Dad's

“Who am I?” Dad’s was a relatively dull imprint of Abraham’s experienced creatureliness, but they, Abraham and Dad, were on the same page. There is a G-d. Maimonides wrote that Abraham exemplified the highest form of the service of G-d, not for fear of punishment for desire reward, but to do “truth because it is truth”. Dad’s “I try to live decently, not because of sanctions of Heaven or Hell but because that’s the right way” is a ray of that very same Abrahamic fire dimmed through thousands of years of exile.

Abraham forged a nation, the Jewish people, and was the father of a host of nations and cultures - religious humanity - through his hallmark love of humanity combined with his desire to actualize and unify individuals in the image of their Creator through culture of their Creator’s laws. As Governor General, Dad too rebuilt or healed a divided nation, and indeed throughout his life constantly sought to work consensus, by modelling mutual respect and decent values. But did Dad think, throughout his life, that he was doing these things under a spiritual aegis? Or was it essentially a secularized, liberal humanism?

Dad was not philosophical. He was a doer. As a teenager, I also once probed him, “Dad, what is your philosophy of life?” He answered me, “The next thing and then the next thing”. He was a speaker too, not just at the podium, but also at the table. His voice was the first and foremost; it lead and people listened. His illness of the last twenty-two years – Parkinsons - does not attack the cognitive faculties; it causes muscular atrophy. It could not dim his immensely, constantly exercised mind. But it progressively immobilized his body; and then it virtually took away his ability to speak. Dad’s response to this was not anger nor even irritation. He was cast into, and accepted, an entire new modality of listening. And

from listening, he came to something deeper –*receptivity* – and I believe this was the vehicle of a significant conscious spiritual growth.

Divine values were transmitted and communicated to Abraham, to be reiterated at Sinai, governing the right conduct, between human and human and between the human and his or her Creator. With respect to these values, G-d blessed Abraham, because, He said in the Bible, “*I know that he will instruct his sons and his household after him to keep the way of G-d - to do charity and justice*”. My father (and mother) projected a further three generations in this very same tradition from Abraham and Sinai, and were blessed. All his children married according to Jewish tradition; all his grandchildren have studied or currently study in Jewish schools and it is the intention of their parents that the great grandchildren do so too. We saw our father’s palpable pleasure in this perpetuated tradition of values. He affirmed it with the relatively few words he had left. In short, he acknowledged the spiritual lineage and content of his own work.

In recent months, my father told me privately that he felt my own efforts to communicate universal values from Sinai were very important. He affirmed the need for a moral anchor in politics, and indicated his feeling that in recent legislation and legislative debate, society was losing its moral moorings. Today the millennial transmission of the Divine template of human identity and conduct is being challenged. My father, alive to the Abrahamic spiritual heritage, knew and communicated to me his disturbance at these challenges. So we shall continue to work to preserve and strengthen the tradition of values he ever more consciously served. His accomplishments back our efforts. He is our masthead and his merit will live on and on to help carry us to success in achieving a human *and* a G-dly world.