

## **Eulogy for Rabbi Aaron Landes (z"l) by Timothy Kolman**

The Lord hath been mindful of us: he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron.

Psalm 115

The first time that I saw Rabbi Landes was in 1980 – on this pulpit - at this synagogue – at Sabbath services shortly after I had arrived in this country for the first time. He was a towering presence – both physically and spiritually. Since I was an immigrant, I was entirely unfamiliar with American regional accents and so when I heard the Rabbi speak, I was certain he was from England although where in England, I couldn't quite tell. Of course he was from England, New England – from Revere, Massachusetts, where his father, Henry Landes, an immigrant from Poland, and a prominent Rabbi in his own right, had tended two congregations as well as overseeing that the local kosher butcher properly adhered to the laws of kashrut.

From these humble beginnings, in their small second floor apartment in Revere, in that Orthodox rabbinic household, in the midst of the depression, the young Aaron Landes learned Talmud and Torah at his father's knee.

And although it was an Orthodox upbringing, his was neither a closeted nor parochial schooling. His parents were active in the community around them. They were respected by Jews and non-Jews alike and the young Aaron was often the interface, the translator, the facilitator of language and custom between his immigrant parents and the obstacles they confronted in their new lives as Americans.

He learned to play baseball in the street with Jewish and non-Jewish friends alike. He accompanied his mother, Bessie Landes, on her visits to the sick. She was, in his words, a charming, gregarious and socially outgoing woman with close personal ties to each and every Congregant.

It was these unvarnished human experiences, reflecting community service, intellectual rigor and religious discipline which favorably positioned the young Aaron Landes for his Rabbinical vocation and when he declared that vocation, his older brother Morris, himself an Orthodox Rabbi, argued to their father that Arki - the Yiddish name for Aaron -and the particular term of endearment his siblings and his close friends used for him, should be ordained not as an Orthodox Rabbi, but rather as a Conservative one since it was there, in the Jewish Conservative Movement that American Jewish growth was then most vibrant. Their father, a tolerant, clever and insightful man, gave his blessing to his son becoming a Conservative Rabbi.

Rabbi Landes went on to excel at the Seminary. He was as brilliant in his Hebraic and Judaic studies, as he was in his secular education. He excelled at sports and also of course in the United States Navy, where he rose to the rank of Rear Admiral. In every aspect – in every facet of his life – including in his family life-he achieved an unsurpassed excellence - truly expressive of his considerable intellectual and moral qualities.

But it was to be here, at Beth Sholom, in this building, in this unique and blessed setting, that he was to lead and guide the congregation, his congregation, the congregation he loved, the congregation that was and is his family.

In the nobility of his carriage, in the solemn dignity he brought to worship, in the statesmanlike quality of his insight, in his exquisite tolerance for all, he seemed to do God's work effortlessly.

A significant part of his legacy is here. Not in the architectural finery or in the mundane trappings, but in the hearts and in the souls and in the memories of those he comforted and guided, counseled and advised. All of us have unique and singular memories of his special contribution to the wonderful and sometimes the tragic moments of our lives. He officiated at my wedding to Rebecca. He publicly spoke to all of my children at their bar and bat mitzvahs. We felt comforted and secure knowing his hand was firmly on the tiller of our lives piloting us through the pitch and roll of life's stormy seas. He comforted me at the death of Carol, my first wife, and he consoled both my father and me at the passing of my mother.

But Abba – who will comfort us now? Who will console us now? To never again hear the love in your voice or to feel the strength of your hug, or the sweetness of your kiss. Abba who will comfort us now. You who have comforted us all.

You came to us as a precious gift and we are bereft. We are all bereft.

Goodness and kindness, knowledge and judgment seemed to flow from him as a fountain of cool, cool water on a stifling day. Deeply observant and as profoundly dedicated to God in his personal life as he was in public, this holy man had an unshakeable faith in the existence of God and in the immortality of the Jewish people.

As he drifted from us, his gentleness and humanity burned bright as if from a fading star and when, most recently, he could no longer sit at the Seder table, the Seder was brought to him first in his bedroom and then on the second night in his study at home.

And as he sat upright in his chair, with his family around him, he seemed as a king – this patriarch – this divine example of what humanity can be - surrounded by the overwhelming love of his wife and soulmate, Sora, and their cherished children and grandchildren. It was as deeply, deeply moving as it was poignant. And it was as if, at that time and at that moment, with all of his family around him, we were all permitted to return just a tiny measure of the immeasurable love he had himself bestowed upon us all.

And so we wrapped him up in a blanket of song and prayer and swept him up with us for one last precious time. And at that time - and at that moment - - it seemed impossible to deny that the *shechina* itself, the divine and ineffable spirit of the Lord God of Israel, had entered the Landes household-to witness such devotion - for this devotion – this love – was, and is, and shall ever remain his legacy.

The Lord hath been mindful of us: He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron.