

## **Eulogy for Rabbi Aaron Landes (z"l) by Rabbi David Glanzberg-Krainin**

- When a Rabbi is called to the Torah for an *aliyah*, or when a Rabbi is being presented before his or her congregation, it is customary to introduce one's Rabbi by using the Hebrew phrase *Moreinu Ha'Rav*—"Our Teacher, the Rabbi," or more literally: "Our Teacher, the Teacher."
- The primary role of the Rabbi in Jewish tradition is to be a teacher. In this way, *Moreinu Ha'Rav Aharon ben Ha'Rav Elhanan Ozer v'Hannah Pasha (zikhrone livrakha*—our teacher, the teacher Rabbi Aaron Landes (of blessed memory) embodied the essence of what we try to capture when we say: *Moreinu Ha'Rav*.
- For our beloved Rabbi Aaron Landes both taught us when he was teaching and he taught us when he was being.
- And so the privilege of being part of his community, and of being engulfed in his presence—and what a presence it was! Who here among us wouldn't wish to have the posture and the bearing that Rabbi Landes had well into his 80's—at any time in our lives? His was indeed a presence. And when Rabbi Landes engulfed you with his presence, you had an opportunity to learn something from him because he taught with words, he taught with actions, and he taught with his attention.
- I want to eulogize my teacher and my friend, Rabbi Aaron Landes—who, by the way, honored me as a colleague by asking me to call him Aaron—and so you will hear me refer to him in this eulogy both as Rabbi Landes and as Aaron—I want to honor my teacher and my friend by sharing with you some of the teachings that I think Aaron most embodied in his life. This is in no way an exhaustive list of Rabbi Landes' teachings—they are simply my attempt to distill what I believe are some of the most important lessons I learned during our ten-year relationship. I have divided them into seven categories to represent the fact that we learned from Rabbi Landes each and every day of the week:

***Moreinu Ha’Rav Teaching #1: If You Are Very Lucky, Find Yourself a Partner in Life Like Sora Landes, and Treat Her with the Love, Admiration, and Respect with Which Aaron Treated His *Beshert****

- Perhaps it was not completely *beshert*—Aaron was told by the staff at Camp Mossad that Sora was indeed the one that he should seek out. And so Aaron did what any suave counselor would have done to try to win the heart and admiration of his intended: He offered to teach her how to swim! Yes, he was actually the Swim Instructor! And it worked! Not that Sora ever learned to like swimming, but she did learn to like—rather, she learned to love—that handsome Swim Instructor—and the rest is history!
- But Sora, what a beautiful partnership the two of you had: From your student days on 110<sup>th</sup> and Broadway; to the Navy days in Norfolk; to the early days of parenting four young children as you adapted to congregational life in Erie; to the decades here in Elkins Park where the two of you founded the Forman Hebrew Day School that is now part of the Perelman Jewish Day School and served Beth Sholom Congregation.
- How the two of you managed to create a family life like you did—in a generation in which you were always in the public eye—and to do so with such grace—and to do so with such love and tenderness and respect—we are all still in awe at the two of you. It is indeed rare to find a couple that managed both to prioritize their family and be of such great service to the Jewish community.
- We are truly grateful to the two of you for what you both have given us. But we understand it was your ability to prioritize each other that made it all possible.

***Moreinu Ha’Rav Teaching #2: The Corollary to Teaching #1: Rabbis Sometimes Have to Make Sacrifices for Their Congregation at the Expense of Their Families, but Always Find a Way to Show Your Children that They Are Your Top Priority***

- This one is self-evident. There was nothing more important to Aaron Landes than his family.
- You needed to do little more than spend time in the presence of Rabbi Landes and his children and grandchildren to know this truth. Such love, respect and admiration—as you have heard.

- If you were fortunate enough to marry into this family, you had equal status to the children who were flesh and blood. There was—and is—no such thing as in-law in the Landes universe—you were—and are—just part of this family.
- And we saw that each and every time you were all together—not just during these last few weeks when you were all here each and every day—we saw how much you loved your father and grandfather—how much you respected him and how much you treasured him. Your love for each other was—and is—an absolute joy to behold.

### ***Moreinu Ha’Rav Teaching #3: Try to Live up to the Name that You Have Been Given***

- Aaron, when we think of you, we think of *Aharon*—the High priest—who embodied the gift of **Shalom** for the Jewish people.
- You, too, taught us to try to create **Shalom**. Not by whitewashing our differences, but by accepting different opinions and by trying to make room for those with different positions to co-exist together—and to make room for each other because we are part of a community—despite our differences.
- Aaron, you were an “*ohev shalom v’rodef shalom, ohev et habriot umekarvan laTorah,*” you were a “lover of peace and pursuer of peace, one who loved all human beings and who strove to bring them closer to Torah.”

### ***Moreinu Ha’Rav Teaching #4: Treat Everyone Equally—Regardless of Station—Be Kind, and Greet People B’sever Panim Yafot—With a Smile upon Your Face and a Pleasant Countenance***

- I don’t think there is a person in this room who can close his or her eyes and think of *Moreinu Ha’Rav* Aaron Landes and not see in your mind’s eye a smile upon his face.
- I have to admit—the first time I heard him say: “Rabbi, it’s so good to see you. I must have a hug...” I have to admit that my eyebrow cocked just a little bit in incredulity: “Really?!? You **must** have a hug?”
- But that was our Rabbi Landes—He meant it—he truly wanted a hug! And what a gift it was to receive that hug—and that smile. And of course, his parting words: “God bless you!” He meant that too!

- All of us feel blessed by those blessings—and those hugs—and that kindness, and attention which came to you regardless of your station in life. When you were in his presence, you were the recipient of Rabbi Landes’ undivided attention, his exquisite insight and judgment, and always, that cheerful countenance.

### ***Moreinu Ha’Rav* Teaching #5: Be Principled in Your Convictions and Live Them Out Through Your Actions**

- Here are some of the principles and convictions that Aaron Landes lived out and whose legacy we still derive benefit from today:
- As the Torah instructs us, we can prosper through short-term loans in which we don’t charge each other interest. Rabbi Landes was instrumental in founding the Philadelphia Hebrew Free Loan Society here at Beth Sholom which has allowed thousands of Jews to make a positive change in their lives with dignity and without paying interest.
- A vibrant morning *minyan* can change the culture of a congregation even as it brings healing to those who have recently become mourners. Rabbi Landes championed our daily *minyan* here at Beth Sholom and was a proud *minyaniare*. The strength of our morning *minyan* was one of *Moreinu Ha’Rav’s* proud accomplishments.
- The greatest insurance policy for the perpetuation of Jewish life is the commitment to serious Jewish education. Rabbi Landes championed Jewish Day School; strong synagogue education for children; Jewish camping, and adult learning. And Rabbi Landes continued to learn and to study throughout his adult life—he and Sora were part of a weekly Mishnah study group, they studied texts in Hebrew together, and they were lifelong Jewish learners together.
- You could be both an *Ohev Tziyon*—a Lover of Israel—and an American patriot—Rabbi Landes was clearly both.
- Be responsible with Finances: Rabbi Landes was a person who was a careful financial planner in his personal and family life—and he was a brilliant fundraiser who is largely responsible for the endowment and financial health of Beth Sholom Congregation to this day.
- At the same time that you are responsible with your money, be sure to give a good amount of it to *tzedakah*. Aaron and Sora were well known throughout the Philadelphia

Jewish community—and beyond—for supporting a myriad of Jewish organizations with their gifts of *tzedakah*.

- Take Care of the Body with Which God has entrusted to you. Rabbi Landes was equally fastidious about exercise and eating well—his physical vitality and vibrancy throughout his life was no accident. Many of us have had memorable conversations with *Moreinu Ha’Rav* in the midst of a brisk walk—and if there was someone who might have ended up a bit winded from the experience, it was never Rabbi Landes.

***Moreinu Ha’Rav* Teaching #6: Be Willing to Adapt to Changing Circumstances—and To Find Blessing in Each Stage—Rather than Feeling Resentful about Changes or Limitations.**

- Many of you in this room may have stood under a *huppah* on this very *bima* with Rabbi Landes (and likely Hazzan Tilman) as the two of them officiated on your wedding day. Before that day, you would have undoubtedly had meetings with Rabbi Landes in which he might have discussed with the two of you the importance of physical intimacy in maintaining a healthy marriage. This might have made **you** feel uncomfortable to be talking about this with your rabbi. But your rabbi was way ahead of his time. He had chosen to take classes in order to become a certified Family and Marital Counselor at the Penn Council for Relationships. And he was aware of the fragility of the enterprise of marriage—and the importance of strong marriages in Jewish life. So he would talk to you about intimacy—and about communication—and he was doing this at a time long before reality television made these subjects boring.
- *Moreinu Ha’Rav* was what we call today an early adapter. He brought technology and language labs into the supplementary school here at Beth Sholom long before other synagogues considered using language labs. He was an early champion of adult Bat Mitzvah for those women who had grown up never having had the opportunity to study for Bat Mitzvah.
- And Rabbi Landes taught us to expect change—and to embrace change—throughout one’s life. And here’s the truly amazing part: He taught us to find the blessings in change—even when those changes would be—for most of us—difficult to accept. As his grandson Jeremy recounted about seeing his grandfather using a walker for the first time just about a month ago. *Moreinu Ha’Rav* said to his grandson: “Jeremy, with this walker,

I can move about. Without it, I couldn't. What a wonderful blessing it is to have it.” In that way, Rabbi Landes taught us to see change—even changes that might bring diminished capacity—as opportunities to find blessings—rather than as opportunities to feel resentful or ashamed. And Rabbi Landes felt equally blessed by the loving attention he received not only from his family—but from the three caretakers who were with him over these last few weeks of his life—as his physical health deteriorated.

### **And Finally, *Moreinu Ha'Rav* Teaching #7: We Can Teach Through How We Live, and for the Rare Few, We Can Teach Through How We Die**

- As the end of his life drew near, *Moreinu Ha'Rav* remained our teacher. He never lost his capacity to appreciate the blessings in his life. As his body weakened, his faith only deepened. He would say over and over again: “The Almighty has been good to me....”
- And as he became physically weaker, his core being only strengthened. He might have been sitting in his chair asleep for most of the time you were there during the last visit or two. But when he would awaken, and realize that you were in the room, that smile would engulf his face, and he would demonstrate how truly glad he was to see you.
- Aaron managed to sit through the last two *sedarim* right up until the time in which the meal would be served. But after the second *seder*, as he sat on the chair lift going up to his bedroom—with the family all watching from the table as he moved up the stairs—there he was—waving to his beloved family—with that extraordinary smile—the last smile that he would leave them with in this world—so grateful to have a family surrounding him for *seder*—still grateful for the many blessings of his life.
- And so it was only fitting that *Moreinu Ha'Rav* left this world shortly after his family had gathered around his bedside to sing the verses of *Kabbalat Shabbat* with him.
- Among the last melodies that the Landes family sang while Aaron was still physically present in this world were the words of *Shalom Aleichem*—those beautiful verses that we sing to honor the angels who accompany us home from *shul* on the eve of Shabbat. As we picture that scene in the Landes family home, many of us have the sense that as his family was singing those words—that it was **then** that the angels of Shabbat were preparing to do their work to help *Moreinu Ha'Rav's* soul be escorted to the Heavens on

High so that that precious soul could be re-united with *Ha'Kadosh Barukh Hu*—the Holy One of Blessing.

- And so despite the fact that it is no longer Shabbat, and despite the fact that those angels have been already doing their work of bringing that precious soul back on high, I would like to invite you to join with me in conclusion as we sing those beautiful words of welcome—and give strength to those angels in their holy task.
- Sha-lom a-lei-chem,  
mal-a-chei ha-sha-reit,  
mal-a-chei el-yon,  
mi-me-lech ma-l'chei ha-m'la-chim,  
ha-ka-dosh ba-ruch hu.

Bo-a-chem l'sha-lom,  
mal-a-chei ha-sha-lom,  
mal-a-chei el-yon,  
mi-me-lech ma-l'chei ha-m'la-chim,  
ha-ka-dosh ba-ruch hu.

Bar-chu-ni l'sha-lom,  
mal-a-chei ha-sha-lom,  
mal-a-chei el-yon,  
mi-me-lech ma-l'chei ha-m'la-chim,  
ha-ka-dosh ba-ruch hu.

Tsei-t'chem l'sha-lom,  
mal-a-chei ha-sha-lom,  
mal-a-chei el-yon,  
mi-me-lech ma-l'chei ha-m'la-chim,  
ha-ka-dosh ba-ruch hu.