

**Eulogy for Rabbi Aaron Landes (z"l) by  
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**An Insider's Perspective:**

**Rabbi Aaron Landes (z"l) d. Shabbat Hol HaMoed Pesach, April 19, 2014**

We share a very special experience, you and I, when we each met Rabbi Aaron Landes for the first time. Immediately, I was awe struck by his qualities of patience, wisdom, self-confidence and yes, love and respect. I was accepted and loved completely as a son, and I loved Rabbi Landes as a father. But, I understand your perspective. Immediately, you wanted him to be your Rabbi. You wanted him to be with you on all of your special occasions, each time, every time, and from the look of things here today, more than likely... just one more time.

Perhaps you came to hear his intellect and the depth of his insight that grabbed you during the course of a sermon. Perhaps you came to him because you sensed he was a man who was close to God and you just wanted to absorb some of his resolute faith. Perhaps you came for his friendship or because of a personal visit; or his accomplishments dedicated to the betterment of the synagogue and the benefit of the Philadelphia community; or the pride you felt in his numerous personal achievements through his life-long dedication to the chaplaincy in the United States Navy. You came because of the intrinsic sense of trust you had in him. You came for his sense of humor, warmth and all-encompassing personality. Perhaps you came to thank him for the way he held your parent's hand and recited a prayer with them when their time was near. Each of us came to be with him because he was a magnet, a personality, and he profoundly touched our lives.

He said, "Prayer is the gateway to God. We step forward three steps during our prayers so as to physically enter into the realm of God. We step backward three steps so as to physically return to the world we live in." He taught that it was important to include the spiritual essence of God into the reality of our everyday lives, and especially into our interactions with each other. And Rabbi Landes was a role model for the way we should conduct our personal, business, and our spiritual lives.

He was brilliant. He rarely used a written sermon except for the High Holidays. He formulated his ideas during the week. You would have thought that his oration had been well practiced: the delivery was so smooth, so coherent, so clear in his meaning, so sensible for a world where, often, there is little sense. His mind was working faster than the words he was speaking, weaving together his thoughts seamlessly, methodically, non-judgmentally, and so intelligently. He addressed the major issues of the day, national and international. And especially, he defended those issues that affected the security of the State of Israel and he promoted those issues that increased the military and economic strength of the United States of America.

His presence on the *Bimah* was so dignified. He stood at the lectern, so tall, so handsome, so welcoming. In addition to a hearty handshake, he gave you a kiss, and he wanted a hug - and those he usually received after services at the Kiddush. But it was that warmth of his personality and engagement to you, “one-on-one” that drew you closer to him. And you wanted to come to be near him and to embrace him.

A rabbi is all he ever wanted to be. I once asked him what his interactions were like with congregants outside the confines of the service. He responded to me, “Every one of the individuals with whom I interact, whether it be at services, at synagogue functions, or during the work week, will have to come to me at one point or another during their lifetimes with an issue of major significance, perhaps life-altering, and certainly life-cycle events, births, deaths, marriages, or emotionally draining circumstances. And I want each one to come to me, to approach me without any hesitation. Even if it’s just one time.” And he did want you to come to him, so that he could listen to your issues, offer reasoned strategies and advice, or provide a referral as necessary.

On questions of religion or observance that were posed to him he said, “You know, it’s so easy to say ‘No’ in Judaism, because the *Halacha*, the “Laws”, are complex and compelling. The far more difficult challenge is to try and find a way to say ‘Yes’” within the *Halacha*.” And if it was possible, he found a way to allow it to happen. He preached *Shalom Bayit*, peace in the home; *Shalom Al Yisrael*, peace for Israel, and *Hu Ya’aseh Shalom*, God who makes peace between each other and world peace.

Let us remember the institutions that he helped to create on behalf of Beth Sholom Congregation and the Jewish community in Philadelphia: He created a strong financial base for Beth Sholom through the creation of the endowment fund, the numerous religious services, the Beth Sholom Religious School, and social groups such as the Men’s Club, Sisterhood, and Young Couples Clubs. In the community, along with his lifelong partner, our mother, Sora, they created the Forman Hebrew Day School with Bill Forman; contributed to the continuation of the afternoon Hebrew Schools; and the Hebrew Free Loan Society, one of the projects of which he was most proud; and the merger with West Oak Lane Jewish Community Center and with Temple Sholom.

He was the second Jew in the history of the United States Naval Reserve to attain the distinction of Rear Admiral. He was so proud of his work with the Navy. He was responsible for the emergence of Jewish services on United States Naval vessels. He routinely interacted with his Christian clerical colleagues that led to increased religious observances for all these faiths. The many Chiefs of Chaplains, under whom he served, came to him for advice and they were so appreciative for his efforts. He helped to establish the magnificent Jewish Chapel on the grounds of the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis today. Rabbi Landes credited his naval training for his successful relationships with people: the formality, graciousness and sincerity of the interactions that were expected. When he wore his “dress whites” uniform, he was an impressive sight, so fit, so trim, and so capable. He was “piped” aboard ship, and saluted smartly by the crew, for which he returned an equally crisp salute.

You came to him because he was interested in you, how you were doing in business, in your personal life, and how the kids were doing. If his help was sought, he would do everything he could for you. Your story became his trusted confidence, your secret became his, never revealed, never divulged, never intimated. He was a consummate professional. You came to him in times of sorrow, to listen to his words of compassion on your loss. He prayed with you, for you, for your parent, or with your loved one, and you never forgot how meaningful his words meant to you. It was what he said, how he said it, and you never forgot it.

Yet he did have a very humorous side. He enjoyed puns, and the intellectual joy that came from playfully turning words around into another meaning. The only other type of joke that he remotely tolerated was what he called Borsht Belt Humor, especially the self-deprecating jokes on Jewish life, for example, using Chaim and Shmeryl as prototype bunglers. His favorite, I think, was the following:

Chaim and Shmeryl are walking down the street. Chaim says to Shmeryl, "I stood up for you today!"

"How so?" asks Shmeryl.

Chaim replies, "Everyone says 'You're not fit to live with pigs!' and I said, 'You were!'" (and he would laugh so heartily...)

You came to services to hear him pray on the Bimah:

(1) When he exulted in the endurance of the Jewish people in the past, the present, and for the future, *Az Yashir Moshe u'BNai Yisrael et Ha'Shira ha Zot*, "And Moses will sing once again";

(2) When he reverentially acknowledged the continuation of the good works of God that we must continue to do in this world, *Anah Avdah Kedusha Brich Hu*, "I am the servant of the Holy One, Blessed be He"; and

(3) When he administered his blessings of benediction upon the congregation, *Adonai Oz L'Amo Y'ten, Adonai Yivarech et Amo B'Shalom*, "May God Grant Serenity to His People, May God Bless His People with the Gift of Peace."

I am sure his *Neshama*, his spirit, is here amongst us today. I am sure that if he were here he would be smiling and wishing he could receive just one more kiss, just one more hug. I know you are here today because your hearts are broken, and because you wish you could repay the enormous debt of gratitude that you have for Rabbi Landes, somehow, but I am sure that Rabbi Aaron Landes would have been just so happy to know that you came to be with him, just this one more time.