Ralph. I don’t know what to say. It wasn’t supposed to be this way. When we were all gathered at your Bris and proclaimed k’shem shenichnas labris, kayn yikaness l’torah, l’chupah, ulemaasim tovim. All the joy and שמחהthat surrounded you on that morning was to accompany you, and all those who knew and loved you throughout your life. What has happened to that joy?

נֶהְפַּ֥ךְ לְאֵ֖בֶל מְחֹלֵֽנוּ׃ שָׁבַת֙ מְשׂ֣וֹשׂ לִבֵּ֔נוּ
Our heart stopped any joy, our dance overturned into mourning.

עַל־זֶ֗ה הָיָ֤ה דָוֶה֙ לִבֵּ֔נוּ עַל־אֵ֖לֶּה חָשְׁכ֥וּ עֵינֵֽינוּ׃
For this our heart was sickened. For these our eyes darkened.

While I do not remember the faces of all the babies whose brissim I have done, I do remember yours. You were very cute. I don’t mean just physically cute. Yes, you were that too, but you had a certain inner beauty, a certain חן that radiated from you. A sweetness and compassion that was to become your hallmark.

You were a person that displayed extreme sensitivity to the feelings of others. Always looking to pick up the spirits of a friend or family member. You had a knack for simply knowing what to say or do to brighten up someone’s day. Whether it was sending notes, messages or emails, your actions gave so many people the strength to get through a difficult time or personal challenge. Just this past Thursday morning, knowing what a difficult year it has been for your father, you arranged for him to wake up to balloons tied to the chair, a fresh pot of coffee and a box of jelly beans. A token of the tremendous love and appreciation you had for him.

Ralph, your teachers loved you. I was with your 8th grade Rebbe, Rabbi Staum, at an NCSY Shabbaton this past Shabbos, when I received the call of your passing. He began to cry and proceed to tell me what a wonderful, sweet and sensitive boy you were, and how, although you didn’t speak much in class, when you did speak, it was always to the point and imbued with a wisdom beyond your years. I experienced that same quality when we used to learn together and talk in preparation for your Bar Mitzvah. You had such a great ear for music that you taught yourself piano. When it came to your Torah and Bar Mitzvah studies, you learned with such enthusiasm and connection. For those who were fortunate to witness how you engaged the text and concepts being discussed, you were both an inspiration and role model in how to approach Torah study.

Ralph, you were an Ish Emes, a man of truth. I don’t simply mean that you always told the truth, but rather you lived a life that was congruent and truthful. The words that emanated from your mouth conveyed what you truly felt in your heart. You meant what you said, and you said what you meant, and you always followed through. That made it difficult and yes, even, painful for you when you began to realize that so many people do not live with such integrity.

Because today is Chanukah, a time for joy, there is a restriction on the type and length of a eulogy that one is allowed to give, so I will close with a thought based on the Chanukah Menorah. On each of the 8 nights of Chanukah, we are commanded to light candles in a progressive manner. The first night one, the second night two etc. One of the ideas of kindling the Chanukah candles is to proclaim both the military and spiritual victory of our ancestors over the Greeks in 164 BCE. The deeper sources explain that this was not just a battle of ideas, but it was a battle of light versus darkness. We kindle the Chanukah lights to demonstrate that just like a single candle can dispel physical darkness, so too, the light of Torah, even a little bit, can dispel much of the spiritual darkness of the world in which we live. The kindling of the menorah also serves to remind us of our responsibility to dedicate our lives to the Jewish People’s mission of bringing light into the world.

There is a religious requirement that the Chanukah candles must burn for at least 30 minutes after sundown, and, if, for some reason, the candles were to become extinguished prior to having burned the minimum required time, there is an obligation to rekindle them.

Ralph, you were a bright and beautiful light to your family and friends. Your personality was a flame that warmed so many people. Your essence of truth lit up a world of darkness for those who knew and loved you. Your life’s mission was to dispel the darkness by spreading sparks of light around the world. Whether it was helping people with medical problems in Napal, Chitwan or Katmandu India or to your family and friends at school and here in St. Louis. But your flame was extinguished too early. Therefore, we as your family and friends have an obligation to rekindle your light, to reignite your flame. How do we do that? We do so by reflecting on your special character traits. Your sensitivity, your truthfulness, your compassion and care for others, or any of the other beautiful qualities that defined who you were. We must make a commitment to incorporate one of them into our own personal lives. By doing so, we are rekindling your light and continuing your legacy of bringing a little more light to all those around us.

“T’hay nishmaso tzror btzror hachaim – May your soul be bound in the bond of eternal life.”

Ralph’s sister Jasmine sent me her remarks and asked that I share them with you at this time.

I would like to use this opportunity to share wisdom as opposed to sorrow. When you think of Ralph, I want you to think of life. Over the last six months I received several philosophical emails from him. They were forwarded to me from *The Dailyom: Inspirational Thoughts for a Happy, Healthy, and Fulfilling Day*, by Madisyn Taylor. Considering that he received these emails everyday, I would like to assume that the ones found bellow are the ones he found important enough to share. He was always concerned for the well being of others and would have only wanted to leave us with love. It’s hard not to be filled with hurt, but we can use these messages to redirect our energy into the beginning of something beautiful. Ralph was always in touch with the spiritual aspects of our existence. He had deep intuition for how to sort through the chaos of the modern world and live with principles of true value. So as much as this is a loss, we will continue to grow Ralph’s love and kindness from the pieces of light he left behind.

He always lived beyond the physical realm. He was born a true minimalist and never thought to seek anything materialistic or physical in nature. He instinctively knew how to appreciate the present moment. Our happiest times together were spent watching the mountains and listening to the rhythm of waves crash along the seashore. All he ever wanted was to bring a smile to everyone in his presence. He understood that it’s the small things that can make the biggest differences in our day to day lives. Family and friends were regularly showered by his thoughtfulness, from surprise lattes to notes of appreciation and gratitude. He always gave everything he could to the ones he loved. I think the greatest gift of all was in the way he listened. He never rushed or interrupted another voice. He took both the time and emotion necessary to fully understand those around him. His patience stemmed from pure compassion. His whole existence was genuine.

Within the hardest moments, we can find the greatest truth. When the ground cracks beneath our feet, let us learn to fly. In the same order as how I received these last seven emails, I would like to share them with you in correspondence to the seven days of our week. I hope you can use these daily principles to help guide you along in this journey. Whether you participate for a week, a month, a year, or a lifetime, know that are helping us keep Ralph’s spirit alive. I believe these messages are universal, eternal, and true. This is not a time to forget, it’s a time to remember.

Spread the love, be the kindness, listen deeply

-Jasmine