

Eulogy for Ralph Raskas

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Date of death: Dec 22, 2016 (after שקיעה) – כ"ג כסלו, תשע"ז
Funeral: Dec 26, 2016 – כ"ז כסלו, תשע"ז

It is not supposed to be this way. Parents aren't supposed to bury children, grandparents – grandchildren, siblings – a brother.

There are no words of consolation that can give this moment meaning.

But Jewish thinkers often remind us that in the face of tragedy, our most immediate mandate is to honor the honorable, and in that tribute, in that celebration of this precious, kind soul - find some meaning for ourselves.

In that context, I would like to share some remarks that Jasmine sent us and asked that we share with you.

*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 every day, I would like to assume that the ones found below are the ones he found important enough to share. He was always concerned for the wellbeing 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 we 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

There is a value in Jewish thought, that comes from the Biblical story of Abraham. It teaches: אמר מעט ועשה הרבה – “Say little, but do much”. Be a person of action; acts of kindness – not just words of kindness.

We honor Ralph - we respect his legacy - we internalize the role model he was – even at such a young age - by remembering how he lived his life. He wasn't a man of many words. But he was a man of much kindness and goodness. That was his *raison d'etre*.

Not too long ago, at his Bar Mitzvah, I spoke these words

“Ralph – You are an exceptionally mature young man, independent, thoughtful, gentle, and respectful. You have a special heart and good nature. And you have a spiritual inner core that embraces the opportunities of Jewish life. These are qualities that express who you are – not just what you have learnt from others, but that you have made part of your unique self.”

Ralph lived by those values -

- **Independent**
- **a Thinker**
- **Gentle**
- **Respectful.**
- **A good heart**
- **Kind nature.**
- **a spiritual soul!**

There is a deep incongruity between the joyous spirit of Chanukah, the festive nature of holiday celebrations, and the pain – deep – agonizing and real – of the loss of such a beautiful soul!

We speak metaphorically of how a soul shines like a light – because, as King Solomon writes, “*The soul of man is the candle of G-d*” – נר אלקים נשמת אדם.

Ralph’s soul was a fireball. Remarkably he loved lights. He lit up in his bedroom with beautiful lights; he spent hours sitting around a fireplace in deep conversations with his father.... He had a searching, vibrant, kind and giving soul – that shone so brightly.

Ralph, who was named after his great-grandfather, who is buried not far from here, as young as he was - had a very mature soul! One that was constantly yearning and striving to reach higher and burn brighter!

Take music for example – they say music is a special window into the soul – Ralph taught himself to play piano, because his soul was singing out.

But perhaps that’s his story – his candle had burnt so brightly, that in a reverse of the story of Chanukah, the oil of his candle – which was supposed to last at least 8 decades, burnt brightly for only 2!

But as Rabbi Rovinsky said, that only challenges us to fill the remainder of those years informed by his example, and filling them with love, respect, honesty, integrity, spirituality and genuine goodness.

It will never be enough.

But we believe – truly believe – that the soul of a human being is eternal – *the candle of the Eternal One*

- so Ralph’s soul will continue to illuminate our lives;
- his candle will continue to shine brightly;
- his light will continue to radiate

because we will carry his kindness and his goodness with us, and channel it into everything we do!

בְּלֵעַ הַמָּוֶת לְנֶצַח
וּמָחָה ה' אֱלֹקִים דְּמָעָה מֵעַל כָּל פָּנִים
וְחָרְפֵת עִמּוֹ יִסִּיר מֵעַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ כִּי ה' דִּבֶּר :
The Lord shall cause death to vanish into life eternal
And the Lord shall wipe away tears from all faces
His people shall dwell in gladness on the face of the earth
For the Lord has spoken it