

Identity *Tribute to Mrs. Debbie Weinberg* דבורה בתיה בת שבתי ע"ה

BY DON JARASHOW

This past Monday, my wife's grandmother, Mrs. Debbie Weinberg, דבורה בתיה בת שבתי ע"ה, known to the entire community as Bubby or Aunt Debbie, passed away. She was not only a pillar of our community, as countless tributes across the Midwest and beyond attest, but truly THE matriarch of Minneapolis, MN. She lived a long, fruitful, and accomplished life.

She was a woman who truly lived for others—so selfless in every way. She spent her days thanking Hashem for all the good in her life, always feeling undeserving, always happy, always smiling, and forever aware and grateful for every blessing. She constantly spoke of how great Hashem is and how truly blessed she felt.

Her passing was sudden. All of her grandchildren came together, most traveling for her *levaya*, to pay tribute and honor, one last time, to someone who had lived so fully for us.

As much as we thought we were going to give back and honor her, even in her passing, a giver remains a giver. When we visited her, no longer physically present, somehow she still gave—and in that, she always will.

A LEGACY

Indeed, it wasn't her words, her jokes, a hug, or even her mere presence that made the deepest impact. It was meeting her legacy, witnessing what she left behind. The untold stories of her life revealed the greatness of the woman she was. How she cared for her family, her extended family, her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, siblings, nieces, nephews, great-nieces, great-nephews, and those in need. Those who were unnoticed, those who had little, those were her best friends. That was her life. That was her legacy.

And when we witness it, we are reminded of what we are truly here for. Life has an expiration date, and ultimately all we leave behind is the name we've made for ourselves.

This was her giving to us. Giving purpose and a sense of mission.

THE LEVAYA

But there was more, particularly from my wife, who shared her experience with me. I would likely have felt the same way and could have spoken from my own perspective, yet part of my *avodah* as a Kohen requires that I avoid contracting *tumah*. So I waited at the foot of the mountain, and I will share her reflections instead.

We are often inspired at holy sites—the Kosel, Kever Rachel, Meron, Uman, or in Kerestir, Hungary, at the *tziyon* of Reb Shaye. Yet, the most powerful inspiration for us this week came at the *levaya*, at the cemetery in Richfield, Minnesota.

The cold, snowy, and windy day set a striking and fitting stage. The frigid weather reflected the undeniable finality of life, yet in that moment, the greatness of Bubby's life shone through. Even in the firm and absolute ending, her legacy was clear and inspiring.

When we arrived, seeing the tombstones—Cohen, Levi, Goldberg, Friedman, Katz—reminded us that no one is spared. A whole lifetime, and it all ends the same. People can live selfishly or selflessly.

Standing by the *kevarah* brought home a hard truth. Life has a firm, unchangeable end. Every decision, every moment, is fleeting. The opportunities, mitzvos, acts of *chesed*, and Torah learning that we undertake are all we have and all we can offer in our favor and merit. Once those opportunities are left behind, they are gone forever. We must *chap arein* while we still can.

Bubby lived her life as a giver, as a *makir tov*, as a pillar and beacon of light, and that is what she will always be remembered for, for eternity. What seems like the end—six feet under, in the cold, rain, and

"She was a woman who truly lived for others."

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snow—is in reality only the beginning of her eternal legacy.

Her life reminds us that we, too, are here for a purpose. We are confronted daily with choices that shape our legacy. In the end, all that matters is how we live for others, the mitzvos we perform, the kindness we do, and the name we leave behind.

RECALIBRATE

Which is why, while some may call this morbid, I respectfully disagree. This is life. This is right now. Forget about what you'll do in ten or twenty years. The question is: What will you do right now to live for that eternity? What will you do the moment you put this paper down? Life, the journey, *Lechteich*—living elevated, purposeful, and for the Aibeshter.

That is why moments like these, these reflections, are so important. They help us recalibrate. We live in this world, but we are meant for more—for higher purposes, for the King, and for our eternity.

We constantly need to be reminded that we are Bnei Olam Haba, children of the World to Come. We are *chayei olamdik*, eternal beings, here to live purposefully, to elevate every moment, and to build a legacy that transcends this world.

YAAKOV'S INSTRUCTIONS

As Yaakov prepared to meet his brother Esav after many years, he feared Esav's anger and potential violence, so he took careful measures to protect his family and possessions. He *davened*, divided his camp into two groups, and sent gifts of animals ahead as a gesture of appeasement.

He instructed the servants leading the gifts that if Esav asked, "*Who's your master? Where are you going? Whose are these animals?*" they should reply clearly: "*They belong to your servant Yaakov; they are a gift for my lord Esav; Yaakov himself is right behind.*"

The Chafetz Chaim asks why Yaakov's instructions to his servants seem so overly detailed. Why did he need to preempt all of Esav's possible questions? And if Yaakov's goal was to appease Esav, why should the first word of their response be Yaakov's name, the very person Esav hates? It seems he could have simply instructed them to say, "*These are gifts for you; we hope you enjoy them; we know you love meat. Oh, and Yaakov, whom you hate, happens to be right behind us.*"

OPPOSITE WORLDVIEWS

The Chafetz Chaim answers that Esav and Yaakov weren't merely enemies. They represented two completely opposite worldviews.

Yaakov stood for Torah, spirituality, and serving Hashem, while Esav embodied Olam HaZeh, worldly pleasures, and living for the moment. He personified *eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die*.

Yaakov anticipated that when his servants met Esav, he might try to charm them or pull them into his way of life. So Yaakov prepared them carefully. Whatever Esav asked, their first response was not for him, but for themselves: To affirm that they belonged to Yaakov and

were only delivering gifts. They were not open to influence or recruitment. *You belong to Yaakov, you're on a mission, stay focused. Remember your identity.*

ROYALTY

When Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979, she had her first meeting with Queen Elizabeth II. On the day of their meeting, Thatcher realized with horror that she was wearing the exact same dress as the Queen. She immediately began shaking, worried about what the Queen might think and feeling that this was a serious breach of royal decorum—even though it was completely accidental and unavoidable.

After the meeting, Thatcher reached out to the Queen, apologizing profusely and insisting the mishap hadn't been intentional. The Queen looked at her blankly, not understanding what she was referring to. Thatcher, now flustered, clarified: "*Your Majesty... the other day when I came to meet you—I was wearing the same dress.*" She repeated her apology, mortified. The Queen paused, then answered calmly, "*The Queen does not notice what commoners are wearing.*"

We are all royalty. We are not commoners. Chazal teach that creation has four levels: *domem*, *tzomeach*, *chai*, and *medaber*. But there is a fifth level entirely separate from the rest: The level of a *Yid*. We are elevated. And when we truly grasp this and live with this awareness, we can look at the Satan, at the allure and *shtusim* of this world, and say: I don't care. I'm a *ben* or *bas Melech*.

OUR MISSION

And this is the takeaway from Bubby's passing. The lesson she leaves us, even in her absence, is that we too are here on a mission. We have a *tafkid*, and one day we will be six feet under. All we will have is what we accomplished here—the name we built, the life we lived. This isn't morbid; it is the reality that gives life its urgency and focus. Yaakov worried about his servants—imagine the *madreigah* they were on—and he still feared the pull of Esav's influence. Are we stronger than them?

If they needed constant clarity of identity, how much more do we. We must know who we are, why we are here, and what we belong to. We are *bnei* and *bnos Melech*, children of the King, placed here with a *tafkid*: to accomplish, to elevate, to make the world better through Torah, *chesed*, and mitzvos. Not to be swept into the insanities and distortions of the world around us, but to stand with dignity, purpose, and the deep knowledge of our true identity.

Bubby, we will miss you. Thank you for continuing to give, because true givers remain givers even when they are no longer physically here. May your *neshamah* have an *aliyah*, and may you be a *meilitz yosher* for the entire family and for all of *klal Yisrael* •

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