

When I was in high school, one evening at Hebrew High, sitting in my father's classroom, I remember him presenting us with a series of Talmud texts, in which the rabbis asked probing questions about how we prioritize even among Judaism's highest priority: *Pikuach Nefesh* — saving a human life. One imagined scenario involved a person beset with an unfathomable predicament. There were two drowning individuals, and this person only had the ability to save one. If that weren't enough, both victims were close to the would-be rescuer. One was his teacher, the other his father. After discussing this in class for a while, we read the rabbis' answer: save the teacher. And I remember well *my father's* quip: no doubt that answer was written by a teacher!

The Rabbis of the Talmud rarely missed an opportunity for self-endorsement, a personality trait that clearly didn't sit well with my father, who never seemed to feel any impulse to chase fame and renown. When I told him that the Senior Rabbi under whom I currently serve, a particularly well known and highly regarded rabbi had told me that he was always fond of my father; my father seemed genuinely surprised that he would even have known or remembered him.

But the rabbis of the Talmud were not averse to self-promotion. And being teachers of Torah, they constantly underscored the importance of a dedicated life of learning Torah.

This week's Torah portion, *Tetzaveh*, talks of the clothes worn by the *kohanim*, the priests of ancient Israel, when serving at the *Mishkan*, the sanctuary. I would compare my father's attitude to that of those *kohanim*, who wore their exquisite

sacred vestments not with pride, but humility, fearing the awesome responsibility placed upon them.

I always thought that I would be safe from the Talmudic predicament posed in that Hebrew High classroom all those years ago. Since my father *was* my teacher, I would never have to prioritize between them. Until now, I never considered the inverse: now that neither I nor anyone else could rescue him from drowning, I have lost both *Avi VeMori*, my father **and** my teacher.