

Rabbi Leonard Rosenthal z”l
Harav Aryeh Lev Meir ben Yitzhak u'Mikhal

Mishenichnas Adar, Marbim b'simha

When the month of Adar begins, we are to increase our merriment.

In a Jewish leap year such as this year, there is a difference of rabbinic opinion on whether it applies to Adar I in which we currently find ourselves. I'm going to choose the views of those who say it does *not* apply – because there is no way in the world that I, speaking personally, or this congregation or this community could be expected to feel any joy today. We mourn the loss of a teacher and friend, a rabbi and leader, a husband, father and grandfather, who has died all too young.

And yet - there's a part of me that can't help but think of Len in the context of Adar-like merry-making.

The truth is that Len Rosenthal was the most serious funny person, and the funniest serious person, I think I've ever known.

On the funny side, he could always be counted on to not go very long without a wisecrack – sometimes funnier sometimes less, sometimes more sarcastic sometimes less. In meetings of the San Diego Rabbinical Association, I was never sure when he raised his hand to make a comment whether it was going to be on

point or whether he just wanted to divert the conversation with his own brand of humor.

And in the context of Adar: for many years, I have read the Megillah for the traditional Purim evening service here at Tifereth Israel. Len would stand by my side as *gabbai* with his ridiculously large, ratchet wooden *grogger* and, in more recent years, all sorts of noisemaking sounds on his cell phone. That, plus his other Purim shenanigans, made it quite challenging to get through the entire Megillah; in the end, congregants' *groggers* took a back seat to rabble-rousing Rabbi Rosenthal. As much as he would drive me absolutely crazy when all I was trying to do was to get through the Megillah reading, I don't want to think of the void that I'll feel this coming Purim without those loony interruptions.

Sometimes Len was so much in the humor mode that it could be surprising when you expected a wisecrack from him but a serious observation would emerge from his mouth. The switch from funny, joking, irreverent Len to dead-serious caring and concerned Len – could give metaphorical whiplash.

Len was serious in his love of, and dedication to, Judaism and the Jewish people, and very serious about the responsibility of being a rabbi. He was serious about making Tifereth Israel a congregation in which people could enrich their Jewish knowledge and commitment and find community. He was serious about bringing meaning to the countless life-cycle events at which he officiated, and about welcoming those whom he helped to convert to Judaism. He was deeply caring of his congregants, individually and collectively, and gave of himself above and beyond the call of duty.

Sometimes I would cover for him when he went away. If a congregant died and I was going to officiate, often Len, knowing that I would be just a “fill in” and did not know the deceased, would take his own vacation time – even if overseas -- to write a eulogy and email it to me. I once had a hospice client who had been a congregant of Len’s. During my frequent visits, no matter what else might be the topic of conversation that day, the patient always had to begin by talking about how wonderful Rabbi Rosenthal was – and of course I would agree.

Len was serious and passionate about Jewish education, whether conducting adult education classes, singing Shabbat songs with preschoolers, teaching religious school students, or proudly establishing the Community Jewish High with Rabbi Lawson of Temple Emanu-El.

Len was serious about his *own* learning. He was continuously interested in how to apply Torah to various challenging situations and changing times.

However many jokes Len could make, when it came to issues of appropriate Jewish practice or Jewish community policy, he took these things very seriously. He was very thoughtful and insightful, and made significant contributions to San Diego Jewry.

Len was serious in his love for, and commitment to, his family. Since his retirement from Tifereth Israel and assuming the title of Rabbi Emeritus two years ago, he and Judy have been able to spend more time together, to revel in the

delights of grand parenting and to be an enormous support to their children and grandchildren.

Let me share something I had no intention of sharing until I walked into this building today. I went into the bathroom which reminded me how, when Len announced his retirement, I called Beth and said, “Hedy and I want to make a donation to Tifereth Israel in honor of Len; can you give us some ideas?” Beth responded that Len wanted donations in honor of his retirement to go toward renovating the synagogue bathrooms. I said, “Beth, no, seriously”. And Beth replied, “Seriously, Ralph”. And I responded, “Our idea in making a donation is not to endow the Rabbi Leonard Rosenthal Lavatory”. The whole thing was so Len-like. On the one hand, you can imagine him saying in his unique way: “You want to honor me? Donate to the bathrooms!” But the truth is, Len was serious about helping Tifereth Israel, and he knew that it’s not sexy and not attractive to potential donors to give money for bathroom upgrades – so he was willing to facilitate such upgrades by so advising those who wanted to honor him. How typically Len!

Len was a good friend and I was privileged to share some 45 years of friendship with him, going back to our days in rabbinical school. Another long-time good friend of Len’s was Rabbi Michael Gotlieb, upon whom I would like to call at this time.