Mr. Allen Nussbaum: In Memoriam--by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

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It is with sadness that we record the passing of Mr. Allen Nussbaum. We extend heartfelt sympathy to his wife Miriam, and to their children and grandchildren. On a personal note, Allen was our mehutan, father of our son-in-law Dr. James Nussbaum. We valued our friendship with Allen, and shared many happy occasions over the years. May his memory be a source of strength, blessing and happiness to his family in the months and years ahead.

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Amar Rav Pappa: Agra devei tammaya shetikutah (Berakhot 6b) Rav Pappa said: The reward of attending a house of mourning is—silence.

At times of great sadness, words suddenly become inadequate. Although we try to console mourners with reminiscences of the deceased, silence is in fact the most powerful response. Mourners need time, quietly and deeply, to ponder the mysteries of life and death; to absorb the loss they have suffered; to adjust to life without a dearly loved part of their lives. In spite of all the words in a house of mourning, the ultimate expression of grief is—silence.

The Gaonim had a textual variant of Rav Pappa’s statement. Instead of bei tammaya, they read bei ta’ama. The place of mourning was described as the “house of reasoning.” While silence is the most eloquent expression of our grief, yet we want to try to understand what has transpired. Grief is not just in the domain of the heart, but is also in the domain of our minds. As we think about the life of the deceased, we contemplate the reasons that the person was so important to us.

With the passing of Allen Nussbaum, our families and communities have lost a prince of the Jewish people. Allen was a quiet, unostentatious person; he appreciated the meaning of silence. But he was also a thinking man and a thoughtful man; he appreciated the value of faith and reason.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik spoke and wrote about the masorah community, that select group of Jews in each generation for whom transmitting Torah is the central value of life. Members of the masorah community draw on the traditions of the previous generations, teach the present generation, and plan for the future generations. They are ready to make every sacrifice for the sake of Torah. Members of the masorah community are part of a unique group founded by Moses and continuing into Messianic times. “The masorah community cuts across the centuries, indeed millennia, of calendric time and unites those who already played their part, delivered their message, acquired fame, and withdrew from the covenantal stage quietly and humbly, with those who have not yet been given the opportunity to appear on the covenantal stage and who wait for their turn in the anonymity of the ‘about to be’” (The Lonely Man of Faith,” p. 47).
Allen Nussbaum was an exemplar of the masorah community. He and his beloved wife Miriam, may she live and be well, raised a family of children and grandchildren dedicated to Torah. They made many sacrifices, they devoted themselves tirelessly—they transmitted Torah to their family in a beautiful way. Allen was a proud bearer of the German-Jewish tradition, and he conveyed that pride to his children and grandchildren.

How did Allen succeed in his role as a member of the masorah community? How can anyone achieve this distinction?

Akavia ben Mahalalel (Pirkei Avot 3:1) advised that to live a righteous life, a person needs to contemplate three things: know from whence you came; know where you are going; and know before Whom you will have to give your ultimate account.

Know from whence you came: Allen was powerfully influenced by his beloved parents, by their experiences in Germany, by their escape to America, by their unflinching devotion to Torah even at the most difficult and challenging times. Allen knew his roots, his family traditions. He was a loyal son, a loyal family member. He knew who he was.

Know where you are going: Many people drift through life day by day, without giving expression to any over-arching philosophy of life. Allen Nussbaum was not that kind of person. He was clear-headed, methodical, and highly principled. He worked hard throughout his life—not for fame, not for glory, not for excessive wealth; he worked to raise a Torah-true family, to play his role in his synagogue and community, to advance the honor of the Jewish people. He was a man who often worked behind the scenes, without public acclaim, to do what was right and just.

Know before Whom you will have to give your ultimate account: Allen was a religious man who felt the presence of God in his life, and who knew that he would ultimately need to give an account before the Almighty. That day has now come. Allen conducted his life in such a way that he can appear before the Heavenly Court with integrity; his life’s record is filled with acts of kindness, self-sacrifice, respectfulness, and devotion to Torah and mitzvot. Even during the past several years as he struggled with illness, Allen was a model of faith, endurance, and optimism. Just a few months ago, his father Fred Nussbaum passed away. Allen, in spite of his own illness, made sure to lead services and recite kaddish as long as the Almighty gave him strength to do so. In fulfilling the mitzvah of honoring parents, few can equal Allen. He will enter the ranks of his parents and forebears, as a member of the masorah community who fulfilled his life’s mission with high honors.

In contemplating the passing of Allen, we feel the deep sadness and the silent pain within our hearts. But we also find consolation in thinking and understanding more about what made him so special to us and to all who knew him.

As an exemplar of the masorah community, Allen died with the immense satisfaction of knowing that he had transmitted his values and ideals to his children and grandchildren. He ensured that the masorah community would continue to flourish in the next generations of his family ad b’at haMashiah.

Barukh mibanim Asher: Asher ben Eliezer—Allen Nussbaum—was blessed beyond the blessings vouchsafed to so many others. His steadfastness, his optimism, his humility, his kindness—these will never be forgotten by those of us who have been touched and inspired by his life.