Eulogy for Uncle Dave: Thoughts for Aharei Mot—Kedoshim, April 20, 2013

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By
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The funeral of my Uncle Dave Romey was held in Seattle on Sunday April 7, 2013. For many years, he taught Spanish language and literature—at the University of Vermont, Temple University, and Portland State University.

Wise people have commented on the juxtaposition of the names of the two Torah portions we will be reading this Shabbat. Aharei Mot means “after the death”; Kedoshim means “holy”. My interpretation of the juxtaposition of these words is that we often don’t appreciate the greatness of a person until after he/she dies. After the death, we come to think more carefully about the person’s life, and we come to a deeper recognition of his/her unique qualities.

In the case of my Uncle Dave, I think those of us who knew and loved him did indeed recognize his special greatness. However, with his passing, a void has opened in our lives. We fill that void by remembering the many wonderful times we shared together, the many things we learned from him. And as we ponder his life, we do indeed deepen our appreciation of how really special he was.

Here are the words of eulogy I prepared for Uncle Dave’s funeral.

Vayhi David lekhol derakhav maskil

To his family, friends and many students, Uncle Dave Romey was "maskil," a learned man in the best sense of the term. He was the quintessential gentleman and scholar, a model of gentleness and kindness, a man who spoke softly but carried great influence. As we--his nephews and nieces--were growing up, he was our model of excellence and courtesy. He was a devoted son to our Nona and Papoo, loving and respecting them to the fullest. To his sisters and brother, he was the "intellectual" par excellence. He always added wisdom and humor to our family events. He was notoriously bad at taking movie pictures, many of which were a series of blurs and flashes. We would watch these films, and Uncle Dave would cheerily narrate: there we are

at a picnic in Birch Bay, there we are on the ferris wheel. We only saw blurs and flashes--Uncle Dave saw the real images. He was "maskil;" he saw things that the rest of us missed.

On our many trips to Birch Bay, he would invariably turn off the road to every state park and other sight of interest. No matter that the "side trip" would take us a few hours off the road! A trip to Birch Bay might have taken others two or possibly three hours. For us, with Uncle Dave as navigator, it might have taken seven or eight hours to get there. He taught us: many of the best and happiest things in life are off the main road. He fostered within us a spirit of adventure, a willingness to open our eyes to new possibilities. This spirit of intellectual curiosity is a sign of a "maskil," a wise man.

Uncle Dave was the bridge between our lives in Seattle and the "old country". He not only was a master of Ladino literature and folklore, he lived as an exemplar of the Sephardic civilization of the Jews of Turkey. He often would say: "In the old country, we did such and such," as though he himself had been born and raised in the old country rather than in Seattle. Emotionally, he was indeed linked to that civilization in
the old country, and he imbued all of us with an intense love and respect for our family traditions in the old world. He used to translate Ladino proverbs into English, so that we all learned to say "one b one d" when something tasted good; or to say "after Purim plates," when someone was tardy in performing a task; or to say "from whence is she a bride," when someone acted true to his or her imperfect nature and we had no reason to expect any better. He was a "maskil"--a perceptive man who was able to identify with the Ladino civilization of the old country, and to make it live within those of us born in the "new country."

Va-Ado-nai Imo

Uncle Dave was a pious man. God was with him. He loved tefillah, he loved the synagogue, he loved cooking the most delicious delicacies according to the laws of kashruth. He loved Shabbat and moadim. He was a man of genuine and sincere love of Torah and mitzvoth, a staunch traditionalist with a kind smile.

Ken Yihyeh Imanu

Just as the Almighty was with Uncle Dave, we pray that He will be with us, that He will fill our hearts and souls with the many happy memories we have of a wonderful man. Uncle Dave was a bachelor. He was not blessed with wife and children and grandchildren. Yet, those of us who knew and loved him are as his children would have been. He loved us with a full love, and we reciprocated in full. With Uncle Dave's death, our family has lost our final "Romey" sibling, child of Marco and Sultana Romey. We are, in a new and profound sense, an orphan generation.

Uncle Dave--you have been, and continue to be our "maskil", our wise and perceptive guide in life. You continue to bring smiles to our faces, joy to our hearts, satisfaction to our minds and spirits. As you now go to your eternal rest, please know that your life has made an immense difference in all of our lives. Please know that we will carry our love for you all the days of our lives...until we too join you in the eternal world beyond.

Vayhi David lekhol derakhav maskil, Va-Ado-nai Imo, Ken Yihyeh Imanu.

Angel for Shabbat