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By
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“A constant fire shall be kept burning on the altar; it shall not go out” (Vayikra 6:6).

This week, our family is observing the anniversary of the passing of my father-in-law, Rabbi Paul E. Schuchalter, of blessed memory. He had served for many years as rabbi of Congregation Sons of Israel in Suffern, New York. He also served as Jewish Chaplain of the Good Samaritan Hospital. Upon his retirement, he remained active in his rabbinic work, teaching and counseling.

He had a magnificent voice and often served as hazan as well as rabbi of his congregation. He chanted the Torah portion in synagogue each week, as well as delivering sermons and then giving a class after services. He had an amazing work ethic, feeling that he always needed to be available to congregants any time of day or night. He was the first to arrive at synagogue services each morning, and the last to leave.

Aside from his synagogue and chaplain duties, he was very involved in civic affairs. He was the honorary Jewish chaplain of the Suffern Fire Department. He was active in interfaith work. He represented the Jewish community at many civic events. He had a great breadth of knowledge and seemed to have an appropriate story or anecdote for every occasion. He loved to speak in Yiddish; he enjoyed a good “vort” in Torah; he was an avid reader on many topics, most of which related to his Torah and pastoral interests. He was proud to be a direct descendant of the famed Hassidic Master, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, and won the hearts of many of the Hassidim in Rockland County when they learned of his “yihus.” He had a wonderful sense of humor and a quick wit.

At the same time, though, he took his role as rabbi quite seriously. He carried himself with dignity. He was a handsome man with a ready smile. He had an aura of wisdom and authority that was genuine. In his latter years, with the serious decline of his health, he lived in an assisted living residence. He insisted on wearing a jacket and tie to each meal, even though the residents there generally dressed quite informally. Although he was not in the best of health, he saw himself not as a “patient” but as a rabbi who could offer assistance to others. On our many visits, we saw him offering words of encouragement to others. He counseled children of some of the residents on how to cope with an elderly and

sickly parent. In short, he never stopped serving as a rabbi until his health declined precipitously.

In Psalm 1, the Psalmist praises the righteous person: “His delight is in the Torah of the Lord; and in His [his] law does he meditate day and night.” Rashi, in a comment made on a Talmudic discussion (Kiddushin 32a), interprets this verse as follows: “Initially it is called the Torah of the Lord; but once he has studied and learned it, it is called his [the person’s] Torah.” Rabbi Paul E. Schuchalter took God’s Torah and—through his study, devotion and dedication to his community—he made it his own Torah. The Torah was the fabric of his life; it was his strength and the length of his days.

To our family, and to the many people who knew and admired him, Rabbi Paul E. Schuchalter is an eternal light. His wisdom, guidance and kindness will continue to impact on us. He was a Torah personality whose very essence was composed of devotion to Torah and the Jewish people. His memory is a blessing. “A constant fire shall be kept burning on the altar; it shall not go out” (Vayikra 6:6).

Angel for Shabbat