

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Giant Steps

On Sunday, February 21, both the beginning and ending of my day were connected to two “giants” of the clergy, both very significant in my experience as a rabbi. The morning was spent paying my respects at the funeral service of Rabbi Joseph Radinsky, 79, longtime spiritual leader of United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston and a major figure in the landscape of the Houston Jewish community for several decades. In the late afternoon, I was honored to be the guest speaker to about 1200 parishioners at St. Martha Catholic Church in Kingwood, led by Senior Pastor Monsignor Chester Borski. The event, inspired by the local Anti-Defamation League, was to recognize the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican II Council in which the Catholic Church acknowledged the value of non-Christian religions (particularly Judaism) and called for an end to Anti-Semitic teachings. Ironically, the physical presence of both of these men, around 6 feet, 6 inches tall, could be seen as a metaphor for the kind of impact many have felt from their life work.

Rabbi Radinsky, of blessed memory, had been a major influence for me, particularly as I was pursuing my rabbinic ordination and in my service to Temple Beth Torah. We studied Talmud together, and I also went to him for advice on a variety of issues. He took the time to personally encourage me in my studies and my leadership. As an Orthodox rabbi, he never compromised his personal standards, but was the strongest voice for supporting all Jewish endeavors, not just those for his synagogue or his style of Judaism. Some Orthodox have a reputation for looking down on those with more progressive religious observances. Rabbi Radinsky was the antithesis of this. He respected women rabbis. He respected rabbis from other denominations and saw us as important leaders in the community. He welcomed community observances (like Israeli Day of Remembrance or Jerusalem Day) at United Orthodox Synagogues (UOS). Most Orthodox synagogues do not have female cantors sing and seating is separate for men and women. When a community observance was at UOS, Rabbi Radinsky allowed it to be used with the customs of the community rather than imposing Orthodox customs on everyone, saying “this is a community event, not just a UOS program.” These may seem like small concessions, but in the Orthodox world, they are unique. Rabbi Radinsky was a true believer in *K'lal Yisrael* – the importance of the **whole** community of Israel. He demonstrated with his words and his actions that there is more than one way to be Jewish. He was happy and comfortable with his Orthodox practice and the mandate he had for his own synagogue and its members, but fully respected other Jewish practices. The rabbi authored a nine volume series called “Torah Concepts,” which serves a resource for many, including myself. As a young man, Joseph Radinsky had a successful first career at Boeing. One day after he received an impressive promotion, his project was cancelled and he was laid off. It was then that he decided to go to rabbinical school, a decision that led to countless blessings.

Monsignor Chester Borski was ordained as a priest in 1967. He entered the seminary in 1960, strongly influenced by a young parish priest who had modeled approachability and kindness. In 1965, when the Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council made its historical declarations, young Chester was in Rome, studying for his life's work in the priesthood. In recent years, he became active in March of Remembrance, a Holocaust observance led by coalitions of Christian churches, and St. Martha hosted the first March in Kingwood four years ago. At that service, he and I lit a unity candle together, acknowledging that Jewish/Christian relationships, once taboo from both sides, find common ground in valuing human life and Divine purposes.

When over 1,000 Catholic parishioners welcomed a rabbi into their beautiful church, and gave such a positive response, it made me very hopeful about the future. When people with theological differences can come together on core values, it becomes a model to influence others. The Anti-Defamation League started because of the violence, hatred and misunderstanding in the world. Today, it's exciting to note that, in addition to battling prejudice, we are able to celebrate the healing and respectful ways we share the world.

When giants like Rabbi Joe Radinsky and Msgr. Chester Borski lead the way, we have big footprints to fill.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon