

## Hesped for Yehuda Frankel

משה יהודה בן מאיר אליהו ע"ה

נפטר בליל שבת קודש פר' ויקהל-פקודי כ"ה אדר תש"פ

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How is a person able to be *maspid* his own nephew who died at such a young age at the prime of his life? The burden is too great, especially when one feels the loss like losing a son. I am not able to cry on my brother's shoulders or give him a hug. This morning, I did not mention Yehuda's name in רפאנו for the first time in almost three years, and I broke down and cried like a baby. I loved Yehuda dearly. Over the years we had the pleasure of his company for Shabbos, one on one, when we really got to know him. He was so incredibly humble and able to hide his greatness from most people, but we were able to see through him. Perhaps his greatest strength was also his greatest weakness – his lack of ability to accept his own greatness and sense of accomplishment. Yehuda was a צדיק נסתר who left the world on his terms – as a צדיק נסתר without the benefit of meaningful *hespedim* and fanfare.

How does one deal with a person that dies at the age of 38 and in some ways never really experienced life. What do Chazal say about it? We have a precedent when Nadav and Avihu died suddenly and Aharon's response was "וידם אהרן". Aharon understood that there was a גזירה מן שמים that his sons had to die – and he accepted their fate with great אמונה and בטחון. Watching Mark and Judy and Yehuda these past three years was a lesson in "וידם אהרן" – they accepted their fate and only increased their עבודת ה'. Moshe comforted Aharon when his sons died: Nadav and Avihu's deaths brought about a tremendous קידוש השם – Hashem only sanctifies His name through those that are close to him. In Nadav and Avihu's case, the Meshech Chachma explains that there was a need to teach *klal Yisrael* that there was still *midas ha-din* in the world – because Hashem forgave them after the fact, and there was a tendency to assume that Hashem never invokes judgment, he forgives all sins. The deaths of Nadav and Avihu taught *klal Yisrael* that even for a small sin, an עבירה קלה, there is judgment. We cannot begin to understand why Yehuda got sick and why Hashem chose him. But the lesson of "בקרובי אקדש" must not be lost on us. And only those who were real "קרובים" of Yehuda, who knew him intimately, knew why he was so special.

It is not a coincidence that Yehuda had to die during the spread of the corona virus. We are all in lockdown and in self-imposed quarantines. Mark and Judy will be sitting *shiva* apart from Yair and apart from Yonatan. People will not be allowed to visit. There will be no *hespedim* – and no opportunity to tell the world who Yehuda Frankel was, but tell them we must. Judy told me a few days that Hashem obviously wants to teach the world and *klal Yisrael* a lesson with this epidemic. There are many lessons to learn. We learned that young couples can get married with a small group of people and be just as happy. The extra \$100,000 would be better spent on poor people. We learned that the sanctity of *klal Yisrael* is the Jewish home – the torah, the *chesed*, the values, the יראה שמים – in short, the house in which Mark and Judy raised their children and the house where Yehuda lived his entire life. And we learned that we cannot control our destiny, we are all כגרון ביד החרש, ככאן ביד המסתתת, כחומר ביד היוצר, – we are just pawns in Hashem's hands and he controls the world and we control nothing. Anyone who knew Yehuda, knew that he already had the world figured out. His values were true Torah values and everything else was *narishkeit*. The only thing that impressed him was character – were you a good person, were you honest, were you a caring person, were you considerate of others and kind to others.

Almost two and half years ago, after Yehuda's first surgery and initial recovery, he was doing quite well. We invited him to join us for Yom Kipur and experience a Modzhitz davening – something that was totally foreign to him. We wanted him to experience new things, especially not knowing what his future held. To

our surprise, he accepted the offer. While I don't think we made a *chasid* out of him, Yehuda died a true *chasid*. To understand what I mean by that comment, you need to understand what it means to be a *chasid*. Normally, when we refer to *chasidus*, we have a particular lifestyle and mode of attire in mind. But this is not the meaning that the *Rishonim* use. The Rambam, in the *Yad HaChazaka*, in his *Perush Mishnayos*, and *Shmoneh Perakim*, refers to a *chasid* as one who does *לפנים משורת הדין* – beyond the call of duty. Rabeinu Bechaya, the *Sefer HaChinuch* and others use this definition as well. Except it is not clear to us what is meant by this term. The Gemara uses this term in cases where one waives his right to a claim that he is legally entitled to. Usually it is financial in nature. Yehuda was meticulous in his financial dealings and the thought of earning a penny at someone else's expense was inconceivable to him. The same goes for misreporting taxes or cheating the government. But that is only a partial meaning of the term.

The Mishna in *Avos* says: *לא עם הארץ חסיד*. The simple meaning is that one who is ignorant is incapable of properly observing the *mitzvos*, due to his lack of knowledge. The *Maharal* offers a different explanation: an *עם הארץ* is a material person, a pleasure seeker. Such a person is not capable of being a *chasid*, of doing kindness for others and influencing others. And so, I will focus on this *Maharal* and discuss what Yehuda meant to us. As a *משפיע* – just knowing him, being with him and seeing him in action made everyone who interacted with him a better person. You could not say *לשון הרע* to Yehuda, or in his presence – aside from being berated, or receiving a surprising look from him, he was not capable of seeing anything but the good in people. He never made a nasty, sarcastic comment even in jest at someone's expense. He never got angry or lost his temper. And he was extremely close to his family and his extended family. A loving son, and brother, a great uncle to Rachelle's, Yonatan's and Yair's children, a wonderful cousin and nephew. And last but not least, he was the most devoted and loving grandson ever. My mother had a very special love for him, and I think it would be fair to say, that it went beyond the other grandchildren. Yehuda organized a schedule so that my mother should never have to spend a Shabbos by herself. He undertook this project after being operated on with a brain tumor. He would give up spending Purim with his parents or siblings and fly to Toronto and spend Purim with my mother. Yehuda was not the life of the party but he loved his siblings and felt very close to them. Who would give up a Purim *seuda* with one's siblings and instead have a quiet *seuda* with one's grandmother? Only Yehuda - his sensitivity for others was not normal, and it is even more admirable when taking his own medical issues and personal suffering into account.

His values were true Torah values – doing *mitzvos*, *chesed*, *tefilla*, and learning. And so it was with every *mitzva* that Yehuda undertook – it was always *לפנים משורת הדין*. To watch Yehuda daven, was a lesson in *יראת שמים*. This was evident even before he was diagnosed. He always took *tefilla* seriously, even as a teenager. He took his learning seriously and loved learning with his *chavrusa*. Who could forget the *siyum* he made on *מסכת ברכות* last year – how proud we all were for him, in the face of hope that he would be the one to defeat the claws of the GBM. I offered to learn with him multiple times and he always answered the same way – he didn't want to waste my time as we were not on the same level. His humility was also way beyond anything normal.

So, yes, Yehuda was a *chasid* par excellence. He was a *משפיע* – he made us better. He made our *tefilla* have more concentration, he taught us better Jewish values, and he increased our *יראת שמים*. I am heartbroken and his *petirah* is a devastating loss to the entire family. His entire life was a *קידוש השם* and his *petirah* will result in even a bigger *קידוש השם*. The past few years, Yehuda maintained a blog of his experiences in dealing with his illness. Those of us who were on his distribution list, saw a glimpse of the “real” him – the appreciation for his healthcare team, the physicians, nurses and technicians, his *menschlichkeit*, his appreciation of his dear parents, and especially his steadfast *אמונה*, all the way until he finally lost his strength. It is my hope, that the family publish this blog, not only as a tribute to Yehuda, but as a *chizuk* and inspiration to other families *ר"ל*, that are, or will be, in similar circumstances and would benefit tremendously from reading how a true *בן תורה* and *יראת שמים* approaches illness and Divine obstacles.

Mark and Judy, I am reminded of what Bruriya told R' Meir when their 2 sons died on Shabbos. Bruriya concealed the facts until after *Havdala*. She asked Rebbe Meir what does one do after borrowing an object from someone. Rebbe Meir responded: they must return it. To which Bruriya revealed the details of their sons' deaths, and informed her husband that they were returning the פקדון. The two of you raised a pure son, a קדוש וטהור. He exemplified your values and was a shining example of what it means to be raised in the Frankel home, a house of torah, a house of *chesed*, a house of יראת שמים. You returned him to Hashem in the same way he came into this world – as a צדיק בלא חטא.

ה' נתן וה' לקח, יהי שם ה' מבורך

יהא זכרו ברוך