

Op-Ed

In Memory of Rabbi Ephraim Z. Goldberg a"h



Rabbi Reuven Feinberg,
Dean of Torah Academy of Boca Raton

Ephraim's sudden passing was a tragic, heart-wrenching loss to so many, including our Torah Academy family. As a literal founding father of our Yeshiva, Ephraim, with his wife Betty ybl"e, produced countless hours out of thin air -- and energy from endless inner reserves -- to help found and nurture our fledgling Yeshiva. Even as they were expertly nurturing and providing for their own young family, Ephraim and Betty ybl"e spearheaded efforts and filled critical roles themselves while encouraging the core group of founding families to persevere no matter what seemingly insurmountable challenges lay ahead.

I'm intimidated when I think about the effortless eloquence with which he would express himself - how can I hope to express my feelings about his passing in a way that properly honors him?

I suppose I feel his loss most deeply because of the special personal relationship we shared. From major school decisions to trivial vacation spot recommendations, there was no subject where I wouldn't welcome his opinion. Ephraim was the first person to call me about the opportunity that Boca Raton could offer my family in joining Torah Academy of Boca Raton (TABR). It was the first in a long line of spot-on advice for me, both personally and professionally.

Ephraim and I conversed and debated, counseled and deliberated on hundreds of issues facing our Yeshiva and community -- and those conversations could get heated at times -- but with each conversation my appreciation for his input and sage advice grew; I always knew his opinions came from a place of love for our Yeshiva, for our community, and from a profound mutual respect for each other.

In the long, exhilarating and sometimes trying journey that building a Yeshiva is, Ephraim established himself as a steadfast believer in the true and pure mission of TABR, with unflinching logic and practicality, such that his opinion was sought on a vast range of topics and sensitive issues long after its founding days.

His influence on our Yeshiva, on the Young Israel of Boca Raton, and on the Jewish community, was not because of an abundance of money he could pour in, but because it was clear to the leadership that his perspective and style was invaluable.

If I can venture a nearly impossible guess at how Ephraim was able to be such a universally loved and respected leader and person, perhaps it was because he lived what he recommended: that institutions, like people, need to be connected to a mesorah, a source greater than themselves, to thrive. He shared with me that one of the greatest honors of his involvement with TABR was that he was able to have a relationship with the Rosh Yeshiva of Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Akiva Grunblatt. Rabbi Grun-

blatt himself praised Ephraim, both before his passing and posthumously, as someone who could always be counted on to maintain a level-headed perspective and tone, even during the most ardent discussions.

The beautiful words he so naturally chose - poetic, witty, crystal-clear, and succinct when he needed to be - reflected the depth of his ideas and insight. It seemed he could give cogent, whip-smart advice about anything, accurately getting to the crux of any issue.

Along with his trademark humor, Ephraim will be long remembered for being a wordsmith - a frequent event emcee, a master conversationalist, a skilled host of many, many guests and the first face of welcome to tens of people visiting and putting down their roots in Boca.

But I think his verbal skills shone so strikingly because of his ability to listen. He could tease in a friendly way because he knew his subjects so well; he could presuppose what they needed because he listened to the tone and hidden meanings of what they said; he could interview like no one I've ever met because he could hear in the answers (to his famously outlandish questions) what made these people tick and motivated them to respond in the way they did.

Ephraim was so well-loved and accepted by the entire community in all its diversity that he was able to be both a cornerstone and pillar among his peers. His contribution to the growth of the Boca community is already part of its storied history, and Boca will continue to develop and thrive because of the life force he helped blow into it. His wife and children, always there with him every step of the way, are living examples of his legacy of Ahavas Yisrael and Yiras Shamayim, which made him a beloved family member, friend, and inimitable community leader.

We would do well to take his encouraging words with us, expressed as Torah Academy honored the Goldbergs at our annual dinner in 2012:

"It's amazing to have the immediate gratification of a project like this, and to think that in our own lifetime, in our children's lifetime, that we have been able to create an institution that we've benefited from directly, and that our kids have benefited from directly, to be able to share that kind of nachas and to show people what people like ourselves can do, which are just like anybody else, by investing time, being part of a team of such inspiring players, that we can create something bigger with more momentum that we ever thought that we could as individuals."

Ephraim will be missed more than words can describe. It is our fervent wish that his impassioned eloquence, deep insight, and tremendous love he had for our Yeshiva, our community and his family be a Melitz Yosher for us all.

Yehi Zichro Baruch

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