

## **In Memoriam by Menachem and Maya Lebovich**

On the 16th of August 2021 we were expected to land in Florida for our yearly visit with Rabbi Dick Hirsch. Since our retirement: mine from Kamatz (my congregation in Mevasseret Zion), and Menachem from KKL (Jewish National Fund), we have been privileged to serve as Summer Rabbi and lay cantor at Temple B'nai Israel in Petoskey Michigan. This allowed us a yearly visit in Florida with our loved teacher and mentor Rabbi Hirsch and his wise and pragmatic partner Bella.

A couple of years ago, when Bella was already sick, we took them out for coffee in town. Bella was complaining about being away from Yerushalaim and was making jokes about Dick. He was an eloquent speaker and brilliant writer but blushed when she shared intimate jokes about him.

We remember that visit clearly because in spite of her pain she lit up in the cafe and we laughed endlessly. When Menachem and I talk about Dick we have Bella in mind too. This was a true love story, a unique partnership of mutual respect. She was behind his career and deserves half of the compliments we all bestow upon his life accomplishments. As Rabbi Akiva said about his wife: "mine and yours is hers" (ketubot, 63a).

We did not get to Florida on August 16. Dick was already in hospice and Florida was the epidemic center in the US. But we spoke on the phone with Dick almost to his last days. He said last words to us knowing we shall not meet again but in Ma'ale Ha'hamisha where he and Bella will eventually be brought to their last place of rest "I love you" he told us on the last call. We felt this love since we first met in 1986.

How does one summarize a close, loving relationship of 35 years?

The loss of the Hirsches is to us like loss of family members. They took part in all our family events. They even bothered to attend every yearly show our youngest son, Iftach, played in in his drama workshop and they truly thought he was always the best performer. They would wait for the young performers to come from back stage and gave him encouraging congratulations. Iftach is still in the theatrical world today. He never forgot their gracious support.

Dick was a towering figure in our Movement, a visionary, a dreamer and Menachem was by his side to make the dream come true. Menachem was to Dick at work, the pragmatic partner Bella was to Dick at home. No wonder these two, Bella and Menachem, found a common language and acted as two angels guarding the naïve dreamer on both sides.

We worked with Dick in The World Union for Progressive Judaism in Israel, we worked with Dick in building the Reform Movement in the former Soviet Union. We can share many stories of those times, but so much has already been told eloquently by so many others who were fortunate to be there.

We already miss his wise guidance, his schmoozing, his clear memory, his laughter, his humor, his tears as we discussed our children and their achievements, his passionate discussion of daily events, but most of all we shall miss his love.

He teared often, he hugged constantly and he was never afraid to express his love. Our family will remember Dick and Bella as long as we live.

**Menachem and Rabbi Maya Leibovich**