

I was probably around 14 years old when I met Rabbi Hirsch for the first time at the then fledgling Reform congregation in Netanya, even before it became officially known as the Natan Ya Congregation. He spoke to us with conviction and vigor of the importance of establishing Reform strongholds throughout the country. It was his vision that a congregation had to be established in the then small town that brought the first of the founding member, the late Dennis Saunders, to establish this community that since the High Holy Days of 1969 has not lost a beat of activity, despite rough times.

Rabbi Hirsch was excited that someone like myself, mostly interested in his high school studies in electronics was also the lay cantor of the congregation starting at the tender age of 14. We kept in touch ever since. He was so pleased to learn that decades later I have become the elected chair of the IMPJ and saw that as part of a dream come true, that Israeli born leaders who were with the Movement from their young age, take the reign and continue the work that has begun decades before hand. Throughout my time in office he was always there for good advice and perspective, even when we did not agree on certain issues, at least as long that you could provide good reason and justification.

We also had a personal project. At my synagogue I deliver a sermon practically every Shabbat and festival, and have been doing that for many years. Under the encouragement of MK Rabbi Gilad Kariv, I have decided to publish a book of a year worth of sermons. One for each Shabbat, one for each festival, with the exception of Yom Kippur that has several. Divided into six sections, five the Torah and one for the festivals, I had the idea to ask prominent rabbis whose paths I crossed, to write an opening for each of these section. It was only natural to ask Rabbi Hirsch to write the opening words for Genesis, Bereshit. With some of the rabbis, though all quickly agreed, it took time to get a writeup, Rabbi Hirsch was ready with his within three or four days from my request. 'I love you,' he said in his deep voice, 'I am proud of what you are doing and of the achievements of IMPJ.'

Yair Lootsteen and I spoke with him just a couple of weeks or so before he passed away. Energetic as ever he had some good advice to us, many questions he wanted us to answer, and several requests for us to take care of as best we could. We agreed to speak again before Rosh Hashana, and I know I am going to miss this call so very much. While mourning the loss of a monumental pillar of our extended community, we at-large, and especially his family, can be proud with the legacy he left behind him. A legacy of vision, courage, dedication and enthusiasm, a legacy of the true Zionist who knows that the work never ends, and that we cannot cease from catering to it. Rabbi Hirsch Z'l will be missed but his legend will be our guide for even greater deeds in the future of the Reform Movement at-large, and certainly for the Reform Movement in his so much loved State of Israel."

Reuven Marko

Co-Chair International Advisory Council – IMPJ