

Eulogy for Joseph Godfrey Kotzin z"l
August 20, 1938 - April 14, 2025

Good morning friends,

I'm Ephraim Pelcovits, the Southern California director of the New Israel Fund – an organization that works to advance minority rights, human rights, religious freedom, and democracy in Israel – and I'm an ordained Conservative rabbi.

The first of those, my affiliation with an organization that fights for the rights and the well being of marginalized communities is perhaps more predictable in my connection to Joe than the second, for as many of you know, Joe was a committed Jewish Humanist,

But with Diana's *explicit* permission and through that Joe's *implicit* consent - I'd like to begin this final section of our memorial service for Joe Kotzin by chanting in Hebrew and then reciting in English the 23rd Psalm, as is customary at Jewish funerals and memorial services

מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד יְהוָה רֹעִי לֹא אֲחַסֵּר:
בְּנֵאוֹת דָּשָׁא יִרְבִּיצָנִי עַל-מֵי מְנוּחֹת יִנְהֹלָנִי:
נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבֵב וְיִנְחֵנִי בְּמַעְגְלֵי-צֶדֶק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ:
גַּם כִּי-אֵלֶךְ בְּגֵיא צַלְמוֹת לֹא-אִירָא רָע כִּי-אַתָּה עִמָּדִי שְׁבִטָךְ
וְמִשְׁעַנְתְּךָ הִנָּמָה יִנְחֵמָנִי:
תַּעֲרֹךְ לִפְנֵי שְׁלֹחַן נֶגֶד צָרָרִי דִשְׁנֶנָּת בִּשְׁמֹן רֹאשִׁי כוֹסֵי רוּיָה:
אֵךְ טוֹב וְחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל-יְמֵי חַיִּי וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית-יְהוָה
לְאָרֶךְ יָמִים:

A Psalm of David.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul;

He guideth me in straight paths for His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,
for Thou art with me;

Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou hast
anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

What an incredible tribute this morning's memorial service has been. We've heard about Joe's childhood and adolescence here in LA, growing up with his brother Ted; his young adulthood in New York City – as a struggling musician and in Chicago as graduate student; his decades of service to the Legal Aid Society and so many other good causes as an adult in LA; and finally his truly *unbelievable* reunion – in his golden years – with his beloved, Diana; his *Bashert* - his (Joe, forgive me) his divinely preordained soul mate.

And there's a through line I see running through all the stories I heard *from* Joe over the years, and in the qualities I saw him living out; His unwavering dedication to doing the *right* thing even when it was the more complicated, less smooth path to follow.

As most of the other non-profit professionals here will probably agree, our *typical* meetings with our organization's supporters have a script of sorts. We open by sharing genuine thanksgiving for past support. We remind our supporters about the organization's mission. We share a few choice stories of the hard work and past year's success that our supporters have made possible, and then we answer some basic questions about how those successes were made possible.

Not with Joe. Joe was *exceptionally* well read about the trials and travails of Israel's democratic institutions. When I'd come for breakfast at Joe and Diana's home I'd be sitting down with someone who knew the intricate details of the struggles of Israel's Palestinian citizens to succeed in the Jewish state. Joe came to our meetings with deep curiosity about the cases our flagship grantee – ACRI – Israel's ACLU – was fighting in the High Court at the moment. He had questions about the tools progressive movements were using to get young activists on the street to protest the judicial coup that the Netanyahu government was attempting and what the chances were that a Center-Left government could be formed after the next Israeli election ... and whether I thought early elections might be called due to coalition instability.

In the past weeks, I've learned from Diana that this wasn't unique to Joe's relationship with the New Israel Fund and Israel, but a *feature* of Joe's connection with all of the non-profits he so generously supported. He studied our work, read up on how we managed our affairs and he treated his philanthropic support for the NGOs he supported – like it was **his**, not **MY** day job.

Joe wasn't just stubbornly dedicated to fighting for a more just, honest, and fair world, he was dedicated to a lifelong love of a spectacular woman – even if they spent

decades apart. Whenever I was privileged to be in Joe and Diana's home, I wanted to see that one photo they had of the two of them as gloriously young & beautiful students at U Chicago in the 1960s, and while I never told them this, I always thought of the most famous love story in the Talmud — okay, there aren't that many love stories in the Talmud — but this ones a good one!

The Talmud tells the story of one of its most famous and influential rabbis and teachers, Rabbi Akiva, who lived in the 2nd Century CE. But unlike many of the rabbis, Akiva wasn't raised as a great scholar, he was already 40 years old, a penniless Shepherd when he met his beloved, Rachel, the daughter of a wealthy man and the owner of the sheep that Akiva tended. To prove himself worthy of Rachel's love, Akiva spent 24 years mastering the Torah, attracting a contingent of thousands of students who followed him home, proving to Rachel's father that he deserved her hand. The Talmud tells us that Rachel waited contentedly for Akiva for more than two decades, to be reunited with her true love as well.

I honestly know of no other love stories comparable to Joe and Diana's aside from Rabbi Akiva and Rachel. Two people who met in their youth and waited so long — with Diana mastering academia in the Ivy Leagues, Joe, fighting for justice here in LA — before being reunited. Joe was stubborn — but he was GOOD stubborn! Unwavering in his dedication to love, to his great partner, to charitable work, to building a more compassionate city of Los Angeles, a world without hunger and a more democratic and shared Jewish State.

The book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 7 verse 2, tells us **"It is better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting, for that is the end of every person, and the living will take it to heart."** Jewish tradition has understood this verse as a *reorientation* of what a funeral can and perhaps even *should* be, from a *lament* of who we have lost, to an *opportunity* to review the qualities of the deceased so that all of those who gather at a funeral or memorial service can learn — "take it to heart" in the words of Ecclesiastes — and in *tribute* to the deceased live a fuller better life ourselves. Joe's commitment to commitments, his dedication to honesty, critical inquiry and sacrifice for his values are lessons I hope that I — and indeed all of us — can take to heart as we leave this service today and that we can find new ways to integrate into our lives in order to keep Joe's values and his good stubbornness alive in each of us moving forward.

I'm going to now ask everyone to rise as I recite the two closing prayers of a Jewish memorial service, the *El Maleh Rachamim* and then Kaddish, before turning things over to Diana for some final thoughts and thank yous.

אַל מְלֵא רַחֲמִים שׁוֹכֵן בְּמְרוֹמִים, הַמָּצֵא מְנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה עַל
כַּנְפֵי הַשְּׂכִינָה בְּמַעֲלֵת קְדוּשִׁים וְטְהוּרִים כְּזֹהֵר הָרָקִיעַ
מְזַהֲרִים אֶת נַשְׁמָת

שֶׁהֵלֵךְ לְעוֹלָמוֹ בְּגֵן עֵדֶן תִּהְיֶה מְנוּחָתוֹ. אָנָּה בַּעַל הַרַחֲמִים
יִסְתִּירֵהוּ בְּסִתְר כְּנָפָיו לְעוֹלָמִים, וְיַצְרֹר בְּצִרּוֹר הַחַיִּים אֶת
נַשְׁמָתוֹ. יְיָ הוּא נִחְלָתוֹ, וְיָנוּחַ עַל מְשַׁכְּבוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם. וְנֹאמֶר
אָמֵן

God who is full of mercy and dwells on high, provide a true rest on the wings of the Divine Presence amongst the holy and pure ones who shine as brightly as the brilliance of the sky to the soul of JOSEPH GODFREY KOTZIN who has gone on to his eternity, the Garden of Eden will be his resting place. We beseech the Merciful One to shade him forever with divine wings, and to bind him soul up in the bonds of life. The Lord is our heritage, and they shall rest peacefully on her bed. And let us say, Amen.

אבל: יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא. [קהל: אמן]
בְּעֶלְמָא דִּי בְּרָא כְרַעוּתָהּ וְיִמְלִיךָ מַלְכוּתָהּ בְּחַיִּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן
וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֶגְלָא וּבְזֵמַן קָרִיב, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן: [קהל:
אמן]

קהל ואבל: יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעַלְמָא וּלְעַלְמֵי עָלְמָיָא:
אבל: יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר
וְיִתְעַלָּה וְיִתְהַלָּל שְׁמֵהּ דְּקֻדְשָׁא. בְּרִיךְ הוּא. [קהל: בְּרִיךְ הוּא:]
לְעֵלְא מִן כָּל בִּרְכָתָא בַּעֲשֵׂי"ת: לְעֵלְא לְעֵלְא מְכָל וְשִׁירָתָא
תְּשַׁבַּחְתָּא וְנִחַמְתָּא דְאַמִּירָן בְּעֶלְמָא. וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן: [קהל: אמן]
יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאָמְרוּ
אָמֵן: [קהל: אמן]

עושה שלום בעשי"ת: הַשָּׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ
וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן: [קהל: אמן]