

Honor Thy Father and Mother: Ralph Tawil, A Message of Faith

Respect for One's Parents is a Mitzvah that Continues Even After Death

BY RENE BEYDA

"It was a Sunday morning ritual when we lived in Mexico," explains Ralph Tawil. "All five of us kids would gather on our mother's bed and she would tell us stories of how G-d saved the Jewish people. My mother would emphasize how the religious people were especially endeared to G-d and therefore they were always protected."

Ralph Tawil, a pillar of the Syrian community, a man who is now in his 90s, remembers this of his mother, but not too much more. "She was a beautiful woman," says Mr. Tawil. "Unfortunately we lost her in 1928 when she was in her late 40's and I was just a boy of 10. She was buried in Mexico and within weeks, my father moved us to the United States. My father was hoping to place us with his married children from his first marriage because he felt that he could not take care of us properly by himself. Unfortunately, this was during The Great Depression and people were struggling to just take care of their own. Because of this, my father placed us in the Brooklyn Hebrew Orphan Home." After one week the directors of the orphanage called a meeting. Something had to be done with the two boys, Ralph and Harry. Apparently they were trying to escape by sneaking out each night. Each morning they

were found and brought back in, but obviously they were not happy. It was then that it was decided that they would all be placed in foster homes through their foster home program. Mr. Tawil recounts, "Since we were many and it was not feasible for one

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home to take in all of us, we were dispersed. This was something that my father worked tirelessly to correct. He did not rest until he found a foster home in the Bay Parkway area that would house us all together. Another benefit was that we were now living amongst the Syrian Community. It was a miracle."

On Sundays this dedicated father would come and gather all of his children together and take them on an outing. "I remember watching the parade perched atop my father's shoulder with my brother Harry on his other shoulder. He carried the rest of my siblings in his arms and remained like that



A lifetime of dedication to family and community was exemplified by Ralph Tawil who displayed the ultimate respect for his parent's with the arrangements of their reburial in Israel.

throughout the entire parade! I don't remember my father ever saying once that he was tired."

Mr. Tawil remembers an incident from that period on Bay Parkway that haunts him 'till this day. He saw his father walking to shul and decided to surprise him, so he snuck up and jumped on his back. His father, surprised, exclaimed, "'Ugh dachary!" (Oh, my back!) Although he immediately asked for forgiveness and although his father insisted that he was fine, still to this day, whenever Mr. Tawil thinks of this event, tears spring to his eyes. He demands of himself, "How can I have hurt my father? How can I have made such a mistake?"

As Mr. Tawil grew and began to earn his own money, he also began to think about how his survival had been dependent upon the kind deeds of others. He recognized that if it were not for the donations of caring people, people who did not even know him, he would not have had the good care that he had at the Brooklyn Hebrew Orphan Home and their foster homes. With this appreciation, Mr. Ralph Tawil began to donate. Periodically he would send a check to the orphanage. (One year he was the guest of honor at their annual dinner.) Mr. Tawil states, "When people think of helping other people, they should realize that it is not important to know who they are helping. They should just appreciate that they are able to take care of their fellow man."

In keeping with Mr. Tawil's desire to express his appreciation for his parents, Mary and Shaul Tawil, he dedicated each of his donations to the orphanage and then to many other institutions in their honor.

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Mr. Ralph Tawil was learning the perasha one day last year about how the descendants of Abraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov remembered the promise that was

made to Joseph to have his bones brought up out of Egypt and buried in Eretz Yisroel. Now Mr. Tawil thought of his mother. She was buried alone in Mexico, without any other family members. His father, who died in 1932, had been buried in Queens. Applying the lessons of the Torah to his own life, Mr. Tawil realized that he wanted to have his mother and father moved from their respective places of burial and reburied together in the holy land, Eretz Yisroel.


For the next 3 months Mr. Tawil worked with Mr. Joseph Sultan, to carry out this deed. Mr. Sultan, who Mr. Tawil praises as a "wonderful man," is in charge of the burial society for our community. With much communication with the Syrian Community of Mexico, hard work, paper work and licenses, this mission was accomplished.


Just before Passover of this year, Mrs. Mary and Mr. Shaul Tawil were buried side by side in a plot that has been reserved for the family at Har HaMenuhoth in the holy land of Yerushalayim. Mr. Tawil is proud to say that many members of the family were able to attend a special Levaya ceremony as well as a memorial service that was made for his parents. According to Rabbi Edmond Nachum, the Tawil family's Rabbi, approximately 300 people attended the memorial service. He states that it was indeed a very dignified service held in the Binyan Av Yeshiva in Yerushalayim, the Yeshiva of Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, and that many distinguished rabbis spoke in an atmosphere of great reverence.

Mr. Ralph Tawil is comforted by this accomplishment. He concludes, "I hope that in this small manner, we have repaid our parents for what they have done for us. I also hope that this story serves as an inspiration to our community members to try to respect their parents at the highest level possible."


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