

Robert Allen Golder

Rubin ben Shmuel u'Bracha

August 30, 1930 – March 14, 2010

This week Jews all around the world are opening the third book of the Torah, Leviticus, -in Hebrew, *Vayikra*. For several reasons it seems really fitting that this was the *parasha* that Robert Golder left this world for *ha olam ha ba*, the world to come. You'll see why in a moment.

The word *Vayikra* is written in a very unique way in the Torah. Take a look when the Torah is held aloft during *hagba* on Thursday in morning *minyan* or on Shabbat. If you look closely you will see that the *aleph*, the final letter in the word *Vayikra*, is written half as large as all the other letters in the Torah. The rabbis explain this scribal tradition with the following story. The third book of the Torah opens with the words *Vayikra*, and God called Moses out; God distinguished Moses from all the other Israelites. Now Moses was the most humble of men. According to the Midrash, *Vayikra Raba*, Moses begged God to rewrite the verse so Moses would not be singled out as being special. God said, "alas, it is too late, once it is written, it is written." But out of respect for Moses' modesty, God made the *aleph* in the word *Vayikra* smaller than the other letters to reflect that if Moses had gotten his way, he, too would have been reduced in stature.

All of Robert Golder's family, his daughters, his sons-in-law, his wife, even his grandchildren all agreed that Robert was THE most modest of men. Almost quoting verbatim from *Pirkei Avot*, Bob's son-in-law Dr. Allan Tocker said: "for my father-in-law it was all about saying little and doing much." And Allan told me that of all the good qualities he had learned from his father-in-law during his 36 year relationship with him, the one he most tried to emulate and perpetuate was his father-in-law's modesty. In this way, the opening of *Vayikra* was tailor-made to celebrate the life of Bob Golder. But there's more.

As a whole, *Parashat Vayikra* deals with the many types of *korbanot* or sacrifices which the Israelites would bring to the Tabernacle, in Hebrew, the *mishkan*, to worship God. And in speaking to most of Bob's family, it became clear to me that if Bob could choose just once *korban* to bring before God, it would have been *zevach shleymim*, the sacrifice of well-being, from the word meaning peace, literally a "peace offering." The worshipper would bring this sacrifice from a sense of gratitude. And if you were to ask Bob, despite his suffering with MS for the last 15 years-plus, Bob was grateful. He was grateful for his wife of almost 60 years, he was grateful for his two beautiful daughters, and most of all, most of all, he was grateful for his five extraordinary grandchildren who were a never-ending source of joy and happiness to him. *Parashat Vayikra* is traditionally the first Torah portion we teach to children because of its purity and simplicity, and in many ways these two qualities also sum up Bob Golder's life.

Bob was the youngest of four children born to Samuel and Bessie Golder. He was born right here in Wilmington, Delaware, on August 30, 1930. Of those four children, Leah, Morton, Donald and Robert, only Donald is still with us. Bob was raised on the 300 block of West 29th Street and his bar mitzvah ceremony was held at Hesed Shel Emeth, at their old building at 3rd and Shipley. He attended Mary C. I. Williams Elementary, Warner Jr. High, PS DuPont High School and began his college education at the University of Delaware. His only regret in life was not having the opportunity to complete his university education.

It was in the summer of 1947 that a 16 year old Bob Golder met the beautiful 15 year old Ruth Glass where Maryland Avenue met the Boardwalk in Atlantic City – this being the traditional meeting point for Wilmington teenagers during the summer. Bob had just finished his shift on the wait staff at the Steel Pier. Ruth said Bob was a real looker. He was a little taller than she was, maybe 5’ 6”, but he had a real muscular chest, and he looked really great in his black trunks. When asked, how did she know what he looked like in just his black trunks, Ruth would tell you that Bob was a brilliant diver in high school and she would follow him around to all of his competitions, because she had a great interest in diving. Not only that, but he was also a great football player, a JEWISH football player (go figure) for PS DuPont, playing right guard (and here I thought it was an underarm product). Ruth went to Wilmington High, so he took her to his prom and he also took her to her own prom the next year – all at the Hotel DuPont of course. They courted for five years, checking out such haunts as the old Howard Johnsons, which they continued to patronage for the next six decades, even when it became the Hollywood Grill.

So after graduation in 1948, Bob Golder was college bound. But then the Korean War broke out and rather than risking being drafted and sent off to his possible death, Bob cut his college career short and enlisted in the Navy in 1951. On December 2nd of that year, Bob married Ruth at the Ambassador Ball Room on Broad Street in Philadelphia. While in the Navy, Bob became a Dental Technician, graduating the 3rd highest in his class. As a newlywed couple, they made their first home in a bungalow on the grounds of Camp Lejune Marine Base in North Carolina. From there it was on to the Navy base in Newport, Rhode Island.

In 1955, after four years of honorable service to his country, Bob was discharged. The young couple first went to live with Ruth’s parents, then they went to live with Bob’s parents. Then in 1956, Bob and Ruth bought a grocery store over on the east side of town, at 13th and Walnut, and it was above that store that they made their first home together. It was also in 1956 that Bob and Ruth’s first child, Sharon was born.

Sharon will be addressing you in just a moment. She remembers her daddy singing “By the Light of the Silvery Moon” to her and her sister as kids. Her dad loved to sing all those wonderful old songs. She also remembers that when they lived in the city, they had no backyard. But Bob wanted to make things nice for his kids, so he took two swings and tied them to the garage door of their 34th Street home, above the black top, so the kids could play. Bob always wanted to provide for his kids. Sharon would later go on to marry David Berger, who remembers double dates between him and Sharon and his in-laws, especially his father-in-

law's passion for Chinese food, especially at the Top Buffet in Graylin Crest. And Sharon remembers over 25 years of Saturday morning breakfasts with her dad at McDonald's. Sharon and David would bless Ruth and Bob with two wonderful granddaughters, Rachel and Stacy. And how proud these girls are making their PopPop as they pursue their nursing degrees at Del Tech.

In 1959, Ruth and Bob's baby, Iris, entered the world. And according to Allan Tocker, who would eventually become Iris' husband, Bob never stopped treating her like the baby. Allan said his sister-in-law, Sharon, could get away with anything, but Iris they kept under strict lock and key – at least that was Allan's impression as a frustrated teenager who was trying to date Iris under challenging circumstances.

In childhood, Iris remembers fondly how she and her sister, Sharon, would steal away into their parents' bed on Sunday mornings after their mom had already gone downstairs. There, while watching Sunday morning cartoons, they would play with their father who had a baton which he would use to lift them up. Both girls were amazed by their father's incredible strength. Iris cannot remember a time when her father did not tell her what she should do. She imagines that as the very youngest of four, that perhaps her father was not given this same guidance in his own youth, missed it, and decided that he would compensate by guiding Iris. She shared with me that of all the things she will miss about her father, the most memorable will be his never-ending source of guidance. And like her sister, Sharon, Iris remembered songs as well, in her case, *Down By the Old Mill Stream*. I have made copies of lyrics to both *Down By the Old Mill Stream* and *By the Light of the Silvery Moon*, and in Bob's memory I hope we will find a moment to sing them some time during *shiva* at the Tocker's home.

Allan first met Bob 36 years ago – a significant number in our Jewish tradition. He was 14 at the time and interested in Iris, proving that he had good taste at an early age. Bob did not want Allan to have anything to do with this young, good looking teenage boy going out with his princess. In the end, both men would bond over their love of football, with Allan bringing over a sub and then spending hours together, yelling at the television, rooting for their beloved Eagles – fly Eagles fly. Aside from the aforementioned modesty, Allan was also impressed by his father-in-law's even-keeled disposition. Together Allan and Iris would bless Ruth and Bob with three extraordinary grandchildren, Marcy, Samantha, and Ryan. The achievements and go-getting personalities of all three children have made their PopPop very proud.

Samantha shared with me that what she will miss most about her PopPop is his unsolicited advice. For example: regarding the Big City: "never walk alone," regarding driving – "The two most important parts of the car are the turn-signal indicator and the windshield wipers;" and regarding boys – "You don't need them!"

Bob was a hard worker. Of all his most important values, Roberta said the most important was providing for his family. For five years, beginning in 1956, Bob worked diligently at their grocery store at 13th and Walnut. Then Bob sold shoes. Then Bob studied and earned his real estate license and worked for Houps and Suddutch. But Bob's big break came when he

was hired by George Snyder and Pierce Crompton to be the leasing agent for Concord Plaza. He worked for them for 35 years, becoming their Vice President and he would still have been working there way past 35 years had he not been stricken with multiple sclerosis, beginning with a diagnosis in 1995, when he first fell.

When asked to sum up her husband in a word, Ruth said “wonderful.” She told me that every day he told her how much he loved her. And they were always going out, even when the MS made the going rough. Ruth would drive. She would pick up their whole crew, from Rita to Jenny to Selma and pile them all in the car, the more better, and get over to the Hollywood Grill on Thursday nights, because Thursday nights was Short Rib nights. Another night, another special, the two of them were culinary rovers, prowling up and down Concord Pike, looking for the specials. From 34th Street and the Old 9th Ward, they made their home for 27 years in Graylin Crest, and then on to Thomas West House on Society Drive in Claymont, and finally, in January of this year, Brandywine Nursing Home, not far from Price’s Corner.

I had the pleasure of entertaining Bob every Friday at noon at the Siegel Jewish Community Center’s Senior Lounge. There, for the past five years, I was Bob’s (and Ruth’s) steady lunch companion, serenading them with my guitar on a steady staple of *Hiney Ma Tov*, *Bim Bam*, and *Oseh Shalom*. The Golder’s were an appreciative audience and I was honored when Iris asked me to make a *bikur holim* visit to her parents in their new digs at Brandwine Rehab and Nursing Home, where armed with a Shabbat basket, I helped Bob and Ruth bring in *Shabbat* early on Friday afternoon. And of course, as Bob and Ruth’s friend, and as the Tocker family friend, it has been my honor to help Rabbi Kessler with services this morning as we pay tribute to Bob’s memory.

Iris said her father’s three most important values were his emphasis on safety, honesty and modesty. Bob desperately wanted to keep his daughters, and his grandchildren safe. He was aware of the dangers out there, and as son-in-law David told me, Bob was filled with knowledge, opinions, and advice, all meant to keep his loved one’s safe.

Bob put a premium on honesty. He especially wanted his girls to know that they could always come to him, always be honest with him, and in return, he would always be there for them, to help them in any way he could.

And finally, Bob was modest. He did not want to brag about his children, only he needed to know how good they were, and he certainly would never want me saying all these nice things about him in public. And so we end as we began. With *Parashat Vayikra*, with its miniscule letter *aleph* to remind us how modest Moses was. And as we remember Moses’ modesty, so, too we remember Bob’s modesty and we say of him: *zichrona l’vracha*, may his memory be for a blessing and an inspiration, and to that let us say *amen*.