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Congregation Beth Shalom  
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Steven J. Rothschild  
*Shlomo ben Avraham*  
1944 - 2004

For thousands of years, when Jews faced unspeakable tragedies they would turn to the Torah for guidance and inspiration. So in this moment, when our grief is so raw, when many of us are quite frankly, in a state of shock at the death of Steve Rothschild, why should we behave any differently than those who came before us?

But which Torah portion shall we turn to for guidance and comfort? Steve passed from this world to the next during *Parshat Vayehi*, the last portion from the Book of Genesis, where we read about the death of Jacob. But this week, Jews all around the world are reading *Parshat Vayera*, from the beginning of the second book of the Torah, the Book of Exodus. We are focusing on the evolution of Moses, from a vulnerable infant floating down the Nile to the greatest leader the Jewish people have ever known – a man who could go toe-to-toe with Pharaoh and prevail.

Which is it to be Jacob or Moses? To know Steve Rothschild, the answer is clear: both. Jacob and Moses were both great men, and so was Steve. In Jacob's story, we learn how to die, in Moses' story we learn how to live. And both great men had the capacity to inspire, to lead, and to love, and so did Steve, in great abundance.

Steve was the second child born to Dr. Alfred and Ilse Rothschild of Karlsruhe, Germany. The Rothschild family had lived in Germany perhaps since the collapse of the Roman Empire. This is no exaggeration. After the fall of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, Jews were scattered to all parts of the Roman Empire, with a strong contingent ending up in the border lands between what would later become France and Germany. Most of the Jews you meet today, including myself, trace our origins to that original community, which through forced Eastward emigration and anti-Semitism spanning 2,000 years, finally ended up in the Jewish Pale of Settlement in Russ-Poland. But during those thousands of years, the Rothschild's stayed in Germany. During World War I, Steve's father defended his German fatherland, and was probably more German than his German neighbors. He became a gifted psychiatrist in Karlsruhe.

Imagine, then, Alfred and Ilse's surprise, their horror, when the German government, in November 1938 organized the pogrom known as Krystallnacht, the night of shattered glass. Just eight months earlier, Ilse had given birth to their first son, Steve's big brother, Edgar. I must pause to share with you the very sad news of Edgar's passing, yesterday morning. He succumbed to ALS, commonly known as Lou Gerhig's disease. Edgar was such an important part of Steve's life. In life, both brothers were successful, Steve in law and Edgar in business, becoming the President of Abbot Rental Company. It is ironic that Steve, with his brain cancer, and Edgar, with his ALS, were both diagnosed with their respective diseases two weeks apart, in September 2003, and both brothers died within two weeks of each other. I would like to think they have both been reunited in heaven.

After Krystallnacht, two German soldiers came to arrest Alfred but he confronted them in his World War I uniform and intimidated them. Alfred did not wait for them to return. He

arranged to get his family out of Germany and to the safe shores of New York City. Thanks to the kindness of Righteous Gentiles back in Karlsruhe, some of the Rothschild's most precious possessions were sent on to the family after they arrived in the States. Alfred, noting that New York City was teeming with German-Jewish psychiatrists, moved his family to Worcester, Massachusetts, where he set up his own psychiatric practice. The family struggled but by the time Steven was born, some six years after Edgar, in 1944, the family was more comfortable. At birth, Steven was given the Hebrew name, Shlomo. Shlomo is the Hebrew name for Solomon. So Steven was named for the wisest, most successful king in Jewish history. It seems that his parents were blessed with the gift of prophecy, because Steven was indeed well-named.

Steven looked up to his big brother, Edgar, but the strongest influence from his childhood was from his mother, Ilsa. Ilsa was honored for her incredible work supporting Jewish causes, from her leadership in the National Council of Jewish Women to her helping immigrant Jewish Iranian children. Ilsa's friendship with the local rabbi and hazzan in Worcester, including partaking in meals in their homes for her family, ensured that Steven would get the Jewish background she wanted for him. In later life, Steven's commitment to both the general community at large, and to his Jewish community in particular, would become legendary. Steven made his mother very proud.

Steve attended the Classical High School in Worcester and went on to the University of Vermont in Burlington, where he graduated with a degree in English and a minor in German, in 1964. The minor in German is terribly important to the next part of Steve's story. First, though, a biblical digression. Earlier, I compared Steve to both the Biblical Jacob and Moses. Both men were incredible romantics. Both men, showing great acts of strength and bravery, met their respective wives, Rachel and Tsipora, at the local well. In both stories it was love at first sight. In fact, when Jacob meets Rachel, he is so taken by her that he kisses her and then weeps.

And so it was for Steve when he met Carol Schick on that first day of classes at the University of Vermont back in September 1962. Carol, who was fluent in German, promised her grandmother she would go to college and learn the grammar, because although Carol could speak fluently, reading and writing were an entirely different matter. Carol went to the head of the German Department, spoke to him in a beautiful German, and he placed her in the Senior Seminar in German, along with four other students. Seeing that she was new, Steve, like our Biblical Moses and Jacob, moved to the seat right next to Carol so she wouldn't be alone. During the class, Carol learned that her entire grade would rest solely on one written paper, written in German. Carol panicked. Her entire academic career ruined. She turned to Steve and said, "I'm going to flunk!" In the Torah, this is the part where Jacob, using super human strength, moves the rock off of the well so Rachel can draw water, or when Moses scares away the bad men of the dessert, so Tsipora can draw water. So Steve turns to Carol and says: "let's go out for coffee and I'll take care of you." And boy did he! The rest is history. It was love at first sight for Steve. Carol admired Steve, then 19 ½, for so many reasons. He was, in her eyes, so mature beyond his years, so sure of himself, so positive. He had deep, hazel eyes, thick black hair, and the most wonderful sense of humor Carol had ever experienced.

Carol and Steve dated for three years. He was very romantic, thoughtful and creative. Rob Ward, a colleague of Steve's would later say that when it came to the use of the English language, Steve was "elegant." Steve applied his gift of language to the most wonderful cards he would pen for Carol. Sometimes when they were on vacation, even at the beach, Steve would write cards for Carol. Steve loved the English language, and both Carol, and later the legal

profession, would be blessed by this special gift for both the spoken and written word.

After the University of Vermont, Steve was accepted to Georgetown's prestigious School of Law in 1964. Through hard work, doubling up classes and summer school, Carol managed to turn her four year program into a 2 ½ year program, so she could graduate university and then join Steven in Washington, DC.

Steve and Carol were married at the Forest Hills Inn, in Forest Hills, New York by their cousin, Rabbi Steuer, on December 18, 1966. This past December marked their 38<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Their's was a marriage built on love, romance...and travel. The Rothchild's loved to travel. From their honeymoon traveling throughout Mexico, their annual family vacation to Ixtapa (pronounced Estappa), through their adventures in Vietnam, Cambodia, India, Greece, on safari in Africa, following Darwin's footsteps in the Galapago Islands, or their three visits to Israel, Steve and Carol loved to travel. Steve meticulously documented each adventure in a scrapbook in his home office. Perhaps the two most important trips he took with Carol were in the last year and a half of his life. The first was a trip to Karlsruhe, Germany. Steve knew that his parents would not feel comfortable with him returning to the country that so cruelly betrayed them. So during their life times he respected their feelings. But Steve longed to see the building where his father practiced medicine, the street where his parents had an apartment. And this he managed to do before the end of his life. The most amazing journey, his last, was one month ago, when on his own two feet, without the assistance of a wheel chair, he managed to accompany Carol to California to greet his newborn granddaughter.

Georgetown's Law School played a pivotal role in shaping the type of lawyer Steve was to become. We are indeed blessed to have one of Steve's role models from that time in his life, Professor Sherman Cohen, in our congregation, who will soon share his memories of Steve as a young law student. Steve, who graduated Georgetown in 1967, would later return to teach at the law school, as well as give his time to teach at the University of Pennsylvania's law school, and serve as a trustee of the University of Delaware. Upon graduation, Steve was encouraged to clerk for Vice Chancellor Bill Duffy at the Court of Chancery in Wilmington, DE. It is said that the Supreme Court of Business is the Court of Chancery, and Delaware has the best Court of Chancery in the country. Carol tells me that this was supposed to be a one year experience – the plan was NOT to settle in Delaware. But you know what they say, *man tracht und Got laft*, "Man plans and God laughs."

One day Rod Ward approached Steve with an offer. He wanted to start a corporate practice in his law firm, Prickett, and invited Steve to come on board. Steve accepted Rod's offer, and became a partner, serving the firm for ten years. Rod greatly admired Steve. Not only was Rod in awe of Steve's use of language in his legal work, Rod was also impressed with Steve's spirit of giving. Rod said: "for every fifty cents invested in Steve Rothschild, Steve would give back fifty dollars!" As Steve's and Rod's professional and personal relationship grew, it finally culminated in them deciding to leave Prickett and start the first Delaware office of the prestigious New York law firm, Skadden Arps, one of the finest law firms in the world. Steve was a founding partner of the Delaware branch of the firm and served as Managing Partner for twenty five years. We are blessed to have Ed Welsh, a dear friend and Partner at Skadden Arps to share his impressions of this very important part of Steve's life. Of the many lovely things which was shared about Steve in his work at Skadden Arps, the most impressive to me is that he treated the janitor with the same respect that he would show to a billionaire client. He took the trouble to know everyone's name and made the people who worked with him feel wonderful to be in his

company. Now that's a *mench*. Like Jacob, like Moses, Steve led by example.

With all the time Steve dedicated to work, people are amazed about the time and commitment he showed to his community as well. He served as President of United Way, President of the Kutz Home for the Aged, President of the Delaware Art Museum, and Finance Chair for Senator Tom Carper. We are blessed to have Senator Carper as one of our honored speakers to help us better understand Steve's commitment to his community.

Many of us are touched by Steve's commitment to the Jewish Federation of Delaware. Seth Bloom, one of our younger beloved community leaders, wrote to the family about the awe he felt for Steve when Seth was a staff person for the Federation. He remembers how Steve would challenge other members of the Jewish community, by offering to match their pledges dollar for dollar over a certain amount. Seth noted that Steve wanted to bring out the best in his community. Seth also noted Steve's attention to detail, even in the crafting of a biography of a UJA speaker. Seth noted that Steve's introduction was more eloquent than the actual speaker's presentation. Although I have only served the Congregation Beth Shalom community for four months, I am already very well aware how blessed my congregation felt to count Steve Rothschild and his family among their members.

I have saved the best of part of Steve's life for last. His two sons, Jeff, born in 1970, and Peter born in 1974 brought such joy and purpose to Steve's life. They have been Carol's rock and support through this difficult time. Carol says if you want to know Steve just look at his boys, because together they embody all that was good in their father. Like their father, they have excelled in their chosen fields, Jeff in law – Steve's vocation, and Peter in finance – Steve's avocation. Jeff shared with me, that no matter how busy his dad was with work, he never missed one of his highschool wrestling matches, taking the time to not only attend the matches, with law briefs under his arm, but actually to go down to the mat, and give him a pep talk before the match. If Steve would not be home for dinner, Jeff would not be surprised to see his dad walk into the school cafeteria and join his for lunch. Peter told me that not only was Steve a wonderful father to him, but he was a wonderful mentor to his friends, sometimes giving his friends the time and advice their own father's could not spare.

Jeff and Peter not only learned the value of hard work and charitable giving from their father, but they each also learned the importance of choosing a wonderful woman with which to share life's adventures. Jeff is blessed to have Debbie in his life, and in September 2003, they were blessed with their first son, Jonathan. September 2003 was also the month that Steve learned of his brain cancer, so Jonathan, Hebrew for "God's gift", proved to be a wonderful gift to Steve through this past year and a half. Peter is blessed to have Elana in his life. They met in Beth Shalom's religious school, showing the importance of a good Jewish education, and both celebrated their bar and bat mitzvah respectively on this very pulpit, and were later married here as well. Ilana and Peter's wedding marked the wonderful merger of two lovely Beth Shalom families: the Rothchild's, and the Mamberg's. The birth of their child Sydney Eva, just one month ago, on December third, brought a special joy to Steve's life. With the birth of a grandson and a granddaughter, Steve could leave this world for the next with the piece of mind that the lessons which his sons absorbed through his life, would be passed down to another generation. What greater impact can we hope to have? I know that Carol is blessed by her sons Jeff and Peter, as well as daughters-in-law, Debbie and Elana, as she faces the loss of her beloved husband.

In life, Steve's life shares so much with that of Moses, whom we read about in synagogue this week. Moses was able to excel in the secular world of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh

himself, a true Prince of Egypt. Yet Moses was able to also excel in the Jewish world, the only Jew capable of leading his people from slavery to freedom. So, too, Steve was able to excel as Managing Partner of Skadden Arps while also providing much-needed leadership in the Jewish community, be it serving the needs of the Jewish elderly through his leadership at the Kutz Home, or through his overall generosity with the Jewish Federation of Delaware.

In death, Steve best embody's our Biblical patriarch, Jacob. At the time of Steve's death, we read about how Jacob was ill. The 1,800-year-old rabbinic commentary on the bible, called Midrash, states that Jacob actually prayed to be ill before he died. Never before, in the bible, was a person described as being ill. The rabbi's write that by becoming ill before his death, Jacob had time to put his affairs in order. Jacob adopts his two grandsons, Ephraim and Menashe, ensuring them a legacy with the Jewish people. In fact even to this day, Jewish boys are blessed by their parents every Friday night around the Shabbat table with the blessing that they should be like Ephraim and Menashe. Then Jacob delivers an ethical will, in the structure of a blessing, to each of his twelve sons.

Steve, with the 15 months allotted to him after his diagnosis, made sure that he meticulously saw to the needs of his law firm, his clients, and most importantly, his family. The reason why Steve's illness and his death came as a surprise to many of you, is because he wanted to live these last months fully, free of pity and sorrow which he knew his condition would have caused, if revealed. Perhaps the single most important thing he did in these last few months was write letters to Carol and each of his sons. Carol, knowing that I am a new father for the second time, encouraged me to take the time now, to write an ethical will and put it in a safe place for my daughters. And so I turn to you, parents and grandparents among you, and ask you to follow Steve's example. Write down your observations and wisdom to help guide the generations which will follow after you. The greatest gift you can will to your progeny is not your wealth, but what you learned in this life. Judaism teaches that wisdom is far more valuable than rubies, because can be taken rubies from you but wisdom once acquired can never be taken from you. And as Steve did, never fail to tell your spouse, your children, your children's spouses that you love them – you can never say "I love you" too much.

Finally, with the death toll now surpassing 123,000 in the aftermath of the South Asia Tsunami, we know that as citizens of the world, we are not immune to suffering. I am sure that Steve would have risen to the challenge of this terrible tragedy. Who will fill in the gaping void left by Steve's death? There is such great need and we do not have Steve to do both his share and our's. So Steve's death challenges us to be far more generous than we would have normally been if left to our own devices. Because Steve's passing places the burden of leadership squarely on our own shoulders. The Jewish tradition frowns on sending flowers after someone dies, because no one, other than the florist, benefits. But if you really want Steve's memory to be for a blessing, then choose the charity that you most believe in, and then dedicate part of your charitable giving to Steve's memory, and then you will ensure life eternal for Steve as he will, through your efforts, continue his tradition of generous giving.

May his memory be for a blessing and an inspiration for each of us. And let us all say, Amen.