

Charles (Charlie) Twer
Yehezkel Yaakov ben Chayim v'Chana Baylah
January 22, 1918 – February 26, 2008

“Say little, do much.” That’s what the rabbi’s advise from that great, 1,800 year-old collection of wisdom literature, *Pirkei Avot*. And Charlie Twer, never one to pass up rabbinic advice, made this saying his motto, his theme song. With parashat Vayakhel, we come to the penultimate weekly scriptural passage from the Book of Exodus. This book of the Torah, more than any other, is dominated by Moses, and that in itself is ironic, as Moses was the most humble of men. He was noted to have said “I am both slow of speech and slow of tongue.” Charlie would perhaps chuckle to have the rabbi of his synagogue comparing him to Moses. But in his quiet effectiveness, in his attention to detail, in his modesty and in his commitment to his Judaism -- not to mention longevity, there is much that Moses and Charlie shared in common.

Unlike Moses, Charlie was born not near the Nile River in the Upper Goshen district of Egypt, but rather near the confluence of the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers in the Strawberry Mansion Neighborhood of Philadelphia, on January 22, 1918. Charlie was the fifth of seven children born Hayim and Rose Twer, originally from the Crimea region of Russia. Charlie’s eldest two siblings, Bessie and Bob were also born in Russia, while Charlie’s other siblings, Sarah,

Joe, Sophie and Aaron, affectionately known as “Ottsie” were all born in America. Only Charlie’s baby brother Ottsie is still with us and we are very happy to have him with us today, he should be *b’gezunt*. Although Ottsie was a good 12 to 13 years Charlie’s junior, they shared a room together in boyhood. Ottsie looked up to Charlie – Charlie was “the brain.” And being his roommate, there were certain secrets to which only Ottsie was privy – like the location of Charlie’s secret stash of cash under the floorboard near the radiator. Of course it wasn’t always easy for Ottsie. When Charlie was dating Bea, Ottsie would sometimes be turned out of his own room when things got a little steamy between the two young lovers. But in later years, Bea and Charlie made it up to Ottsie, be in Wilmington, or during Ottsie’s visits to Bea and Charlie’s winter digs down in Florida.

Charlie had a good Jewish education and always remained loyal to his religion. Ottsie said that Charlie was clearly the most religious out of their seven siblings, perhaps the most religious person in the entire family, with the exception of their father, Hayim. In fact, Ottsie speculates that the spark of Charlie’s commitment to Judaism was a direct manifestation of his love for his father. Certainly, when Hayim passed away, Charlie started coming to Congregation Beth Shalom daily to say Kaddish for him. And once he started coming regularly to *shul*, it became kind of like an addiction – a good addiction. Charlie was a member of Beth Shalom for more than 65 years, serving as *gabbai* and *shames*.

Charlie's commitment to Jewish life in Delaware extended beyond the synagogue, to the Jewish Federation and the Jewish Community Center. In fact, Charlie put his love of math to work for the community by helping create one of the first censuses of the Jewish community of Delaware – which is the building block for allocating scarce resources throughout the Jewish community where they would be most useful.

Charlie attended prestigious Central High School in Philadelphia, where he graduated at the young age of 16, in 1934. Perhaps it was his love of math that found creative expression in the high school orchestra, where Charlie played violin. In later years, Charlie would serve as a first violinist for the Brandywine Pops Orchestra.

I mentioned that Charlie was religious, and in later years was always in Temple. Well it turns out that Charlie was attending Temple from a much earlier time in his life – Temple University that is, going to work by day and university by night, and eventually earning enough money to go to Temple full time by day, where after six years he earned his bachelor's degree in Mathematics in 1940.

It was back when Charlie was 16 that he first met the beautiful 14 year-old Bea Goldberg at Sailor's deli in Atlantic City. Bea came through the door with some girl friends, Bea and Charlie's eyes met, and Charlie was reputed to have turned to his older cousin who got him the job and said to him: "do you see that

girl, I'm going to marry her." Well, it took seven years to turn Charlie Twer from a mathematician into a prophet, but with her strong and determined personality, Bea finally made Charlie's prophecy come true. They were married on February 16, 1941, at Uhr's kosher dining hall, on the second floor. At the end of the evening, Charlie went to count the cash that family and friends had given them, and he ascertained that he and Bea had just enough money for a honeymoon, so they went to New York City. For Charlie, the highlight was attending the Ranger's game, which was tied zero to zero for the entire match up, until Charlie bent down for just a moment to pick up his hat, and missed the only scoring goal of the game. This was Charlie's luck. When it came to picking the horses at the track, they called him Poison Charlie. Nor was he much of a challenge for his Jewish car buddies: Sidney Jacobi, Sidney Cohen or Leon Wapner. Charlie was cautious by nature, proving the adage: "a scared dollar never wins." He did better with his DuPont colleagues.

Bea and Charlie were married for more than 60 years. Aside from their two sons and four grandsons, the highlight of their married life was their extensive traveling together, from their annual pilgrimages to Florida, to multiple trips to Israel, to Canada, and to Europe, with Lake Lucerne in Switzerland being a special favorite for the couple. As Bea's health began to slide in later years, Charlie became a most devoted caretaker for his wife. She passed away in 2003 and

Charlie sorely missed her. As a good looking single man, with a full head of black hair, he caught the eye of every single woman in the senior care facility in Abbington where he spent the last year and a half of his life, beginning in May 2006. But no woman could ever take the place of his beloved Bea.

After college, Charlie's rise at DuPont company as an Efficiency Expert on a Time Study Project was cut short by World War Two. Charlie served with distinction in the Army Air Corps as a gunnery instructor. He served valiantly in two theatres of action: Harlingen, Texas and Pensicola, Florida at Tyndal Field. Charlie proudly boasted that he flew 16 combat missions over Appalachia, Florida. If the war had continued in Japan, it would have been most likely that Charlie would have been sent to the Pacific. Charlie was not the ideal Air Force candidate as he would get violently air sick and always had to travel with a paper bag – and he wasn't so good on boats either.

After the war, Charlie did not immediately return to DuPont. Instead he responded to his father-in-law, Hyman Goldberg's, request for help in running the family General Store, down at the bottom of Mt. Lebanon Road in Rockland. As the post office was located in the store, Charlie temporarily arose to the august position of Post Master General of Rockland, Delaware. When he could, Charlie returned to DuPont where he would serve for the next 40 years. Charlie may have very well been the first Jewish employee to ever work for DuPont, and may have

even made it easier for Irv Shapiro to later become the first Jewish President of DuPont. Charlie rose in the company, supervising many scientists at the Carothers Physical Testing lab, named for the inventor of Nylon at the company's Experimental Station.

In 1943, Bea gave birth to their first son, Dan, and in 1947, to Doran. Doran is going to share some personal memories in just a moment. Both boys remember their dad always being there for them at their respective sporting events. For Dan it was baseball, both in Little League and at PS DuPont High School, where he pitched a one hitter against Conrad High School, with not only his dad in the stands, but Barbara Zallea, with whom Dan would later spend the rest of his life in Florida. For Doran, it was through basketball at Mt. Pleasant High School that Charlie showed his support. So committed was Charlie to attending his boy's sporting events, that Charlie even missed a night of shiva for his sister, Sarah, to attend one of Doran's games – and that was a stretch for religious Charlie. In recent times, Charlie has continued his support by attending his grandson's Nathaniel and Aden's track and basketball games after his move from Wilmington to Abbington to be closer to his family.

Charlie was the first of his family to graduate university, and as such, he put great stock in education and academic achievement. His boys made him very proud in this regard. Dan graduated University of Delaware and then went on to

attend and graduate from Georgetown Law School. Doran earned both bachelor's and master's degrees from Columbia University and then earned yet another master's from Penn. Dan's two boys, Kevin and Ethan, also went on to university, and have distinguished themselves in architecture and public relations respectively. Kevin is particularly proud to be Charlie-esque, having inherited his grandfather's meticulous attention to detail and an appreciation for caution and thoughtful deliberation when it comes to spending money.

Judaism and its continuity has been an important part of Charlie's life. Between Charlie's gabbai duties and Bea's work in the office, the Twers practically made Congregation Beth Shalom their family business. So it should come of no surprise that both Dan and Doran celebrated both their bar mitzvahs and confirmations at Congregation Beth Shalom, and Dan used to be the regular Torah reader for First Day Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. When Dan relocated to California, Charlie took a very positive role in helping prepare his grandsons, Kevin and Ethan for their bar mitzvahs, which were also celebrated at Beth Shalom. And 70 years after his first bar mitzvah, at the age of 83, Charlie celebrated his second bar mitzvah on the bimah of Beth Shalom.

I met Charlie immediately upon coming to serve Beth Shalom back in 2004. Charlie would be the first person to greet me at the synagogue, no matter how earlier I arrived before services. As far as I was concerned, I was coming to

Charlie's synagogue. It wasn't Shabbos until I saw Charlie. One Shabbat morning, when I was in a particular California frame of mind, I created a pre-service meditation circle for some of my babyboomer congregants. Since Charlie was early, as usual, he joined in. I had the guys take off their shoes, close their eyes and focus on their breathing. Then I led them through a visualization exercise. When we were finished with the exercise I decided to check in with the guys. "How did it go?" I asked. Did they like it? Charlie turned to me and told me, "Rabbi, I was worried the whole time." "Why?" I asked. And Charlie answered, "Rabbi, I kept worrying if I had holes in my socks."

Charlie was always my no-nonsense reality check. I loved him for his consistency, his respect, his devotion. Like Moses, he said little, but he did much. May his memory always be for a blessing, *zichorono l'vracha*, and let us say *amen*.