

# Yahrzeit for Larry, June 1, 2014

By Lisë Stern

Seven years ago, in March 2007, I met Larry online. We had an immediate connection that continued when we spoke on the phone, and then, happily, when we met in person.

One thing we liked to do together was study – take classes in Tanach and Talmud. I was reminded of this yesterday at shul. It was a bat mitzvah, and the haftorah portion for Naso was from Shoftim, Judges, about the birth of Samson. This was something Larry and I had studied a few years ago, with Rabbi Samuels. I appreciated the comfort of feeling this connection to Larry.

The connection between Naso and the haftorah is in Numbers Chapter 6, a section on Nazirite vows – the concept of making a vow to God, usually for a set amount of time. During that time, a Nazir doesn't drink wine or cut their hair. Samson was a born Nazirite, a unique condition.

Immediately following the section on Nazirite vows is what is known as the Priestly Blessing, which parents say to their children on Friday night Shabbat. This passage also resonates with me regarding Larry, because I know he loved giving this blessing to his daughters. “There is something about the gleam of the candles, the ritual of singing, giving a blessing to my kids if they are over, and sanctifying the wine and challah that is truly wonderful,” he wrote to me early on.

Larry's love for his daughters was one of the things that attracted me to him, and he especially liked when they were with him Friday night, and he could bless them. This extended to his son-in-law Will; it gave him great naches to say these words to his children. And I know the feeling – whenever I'm with my kids for Shabbat dinner, because I am not with them every Shabbat, I savor the time to touch their heads and say these words.

**כד** יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה, וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ. {ס} **24** The LORD bless thee, and keep thee;

**כה** יֵאָר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ, וַיַּחַנֶּךָ. {ס} **25** The LORD make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;

**כו** יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ, וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם. {ס} **26** The LORD lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

I spoke with my parents about this, and my dad pointed out that one thing that is striking about this blessing is how very general it is. If we look at the book of Genesis and see cases where one human being is blessing another, things get kind of messed up. Think of the questionable blessings Jacob gives his children, or the sibling tension between Jacob and Esau – perhaps that's why the blessing for boys is to be like Ephraim and Menashe, siblings that were not known for any rivalry. This blessing actually comes from God, one he gives directly to the children of Israel:

**כו** וְשָׂמוּ אֶת-שְׁמִי, עַל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל; וְאָנֹכִי, אֲבָרְכֶם. {ס} **27** So shall they put My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.'

We are not asking for any specifics of wealth, or health, or even shelter or sustenance. Just, bless, and guard, and give peace. As we go through life, we don't necessarily know what our blessings are, or “should” be. Essentially, we are asking God to do what's appropriate, for who we are, for who our children are.

My dad says, “The wonderful thing about being a parent is that some of your thoughts and values are being passed on. This is such a wonderful way of thanking God for giving you children and the opportunity to try to form them.”

Larry wrote to me, “My three girls have Hebrew names. Yael, Shlomit and Sara. I figured there was no way that I could control their connection to Judaism once they were on their own, but at least I could give each a strong tie by her name.” Whenever any of his daughters were there for Shabbat, I can see Larry now placing his hands on their heads and quietly saying the blessing to each one. My mom told me that she always sees a strong connection between my father and myself and my brother when he blesses us (the minhag in my family). “It’s very spiritual, almost palpable,” she says, and I felt that too when I would see Larry bless his children.

If we’re lucky, we are able to appreciate blessings when we have them, and Larry most certainly was a blessing in my life.

### *Psalm 121*

- א שִׁיר, לַמַּעֲלוֹת : 1 A Song of Ascents. {N}  
אֲשָׂא עֵינַי, אֶל-הַהָרִים--מֵאֵין, יָבֵא עֶזְרִי. I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains: from whence shall my help come?
- ב עֶזְרִי, יָמְעֵם יְהוָה--עֲשֵׂה, שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ. 2 My help cometh from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

### **Dvarim 28:6**

- ו בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, בְּבֹאֶךָ ; וּבְרוּךְ אַתָּה, בְּצֵאתְךָ. 6 Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.