

Bernstein Memorial

All beloved people take on a unique shape in the minds of those who recall them. Each of us has our own version of the special individuals, whether a member of our family or a Mozart, who bring a smile to our face as we think of them. And so it is with Sheva and Marver Bernstein. Everyone who was fortunate enough to know them has a particular image, a set of associations, that will always warm the heart. Tamar and I, like all of you, have our personal memories and links -- a lively and stimulating dinner with them just this past January; their presence at our daughter's wedding in this sanctuary only eighteen months ago. It is difficult to imagine, and deeply painful to realize, that we will no longer be able simply to pick up the phone whenever we need to draw on their wisdom, their encouragement, and the sheer pleasure of their conversation.

But it is also the public Bernsteins whom we are here to remember and celebrate, and I would like to focus on those among their many affiliations that are brought to mind by the place in which we have gathered today. The first is their crucial role in the establishment of this very Center. Princeton in the 1940's and 1950's was in many respects not the town it is in 1990. It certainly offered few opportunities to those who wished to express their Jewish identity, and for Marver and Sheva, with their profound commitment to that identity, the need for a Center was unmistakable. As in everything they did, they put their beliefs into action, and our presence in this building this afternoon testifies to their energy and devotion in the creation and early organization of the Princeton Jewish Center.

It was here, too, that we assembled to say goodbye to the Bernsteins when they left for Brandeis in 1972 -- at a farewell party which I still treasure for the humor and affection of Marver's valedictory: "I know," he said,

"that when Sheva and I get to Brandeis we will sleep like babies: sleep for an hour, then cry for an hour, sleep for an hour, then..."

The same concern for Jewish life in Princeton animated their service to the University. Of the many changes and advances they helped bring about, none perhaps gave them more satisfaction than the founding of a Hillel organization on campus. Although the University, too, was very different in those days, notably in its lack of women students, the effort to set up Hillel was as much Sheva's as Marver's. Once again, their dedication and determination was vital in creating a permanent and flourishing institution of community life. For Marver, it was a commitment that took him on to the national Board of Hillel and a life-long interest in the welfare of American Jewish college students.

I cannot complete these few remarks, however, without mentioning the wider arena, beyond this Center, beyond Hillel, UJA or Hadassah, in which the Bernsteins expressed their attachment to their people. Their frequent visits to Israel were essential to them, especially in recent years when they had their own home in Abu Tor. That a memorial service like this one is planned for them in Jerusalem suggests how powerfully their presence has been felt, because there, as everywhere, they quickly accumulated dozens of friends. It is entirely fitting, too, that the Israeli ambassador in Washington should have sent the following message of regret at not being to attend the memorial for the Bernsteins. QUOTE FROM AMBASSADOR'S LETTER. When, recently, a number of us were organizing a small group of American academics to advise the Hebrew University, we instinctively turned to Marver, and, as expected, he threw himself into our work with alacrity.

For all of the Bernsteins' love, activity, and support, however, they were by no means unquestioning supporters of the Jewish state. When, a

couple of years ago, Yitzhak Shamir invited a few dozen American-Jewish leaders to Jerusalem to demonstrate how well his policies were being received abroad, Marver was one of the few at that early date who had the courage to state publicly the disenchantment that was growing with the Likud Party's intransigent positions. The Bernsteins gave their devotion, but they were never accomplices; they were genuine friends, who spoke the truth.

It is thus tragically ironic that what took them to Egypt on that fatal night was their wish to fly on Israel's airline, El Al, whose schedule forced them to get to Cairo a day early. There is no glimmer of comfort in their dreadful and premature deaths. We who are left behind, however, should note that they are perfectly described by the most beautiful eulogy and lament in the Hebrew language, in the Book of Samuel, written by the psalmist David himself:

יְהוָה הָרַג אֶת שֵׁשׁ אַלְפֵי אִישׁ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל
 וְיִשְׂרָאֵל הָרַג אֶת שֵׁשׁ אַלְפֵי אִישׁ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל
 וְיִשְׂרָאֵל הָרַג אֶת שֵׁשׁ אַלְפֵי אִישׁ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל
 וְיִשְׂרָאֵל הָרַג אֶת שֵׁשׁ אַלְפֵי אִישׁ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל

"The beauty of Israel is slain. [Sheva and Marver] were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided."

-- Theodore Rabb