

Tribute to Lady Amélie Jakobovits

There are some individuals so vivid, so full of life, that we simply cannot imagine their not being there. There are some lives that burn so bright, we cannot imagine them being extinguished. That surely defines the feelings of all of us at the loss of HaRabbanit Amélie Jakobovits, the person the whole of Anglo- Jewry knew and loved as Lady J. First there was shock, then bewilderment, then a deep sense of bereavement and personal loss, for we have all lost a beloved friend.

I wonder whether there was ever a person so loved in the entire history of our community. The sages once asked, *Esther min haTorah minayin?* How do we know that Esther was divinely inspired? Rabbi Akiva replied, *Shene'emar Vatehi Esther nos'et chen be'einei kol ro'eha.* "Esther found favour in the eyes of all who knew her." That was Amélie Jakobovits in the eyes of all who knew her, whether they were religious or nonreligious, Orthodox or nonorthodox, Jewish or non-Jewish. She entered their lives and transformed them. It was extraordinary.

She visited the sick, comforted the bereaved, reached out to the lonely. She helped more people through personal crisis than we will ever know. Her phone bills must have been enormous. She was a one-person intelligence service. She seemingly knew everything about everyone. She spoke to them, visited them, baked and took them challot. She lifted them by her irrepressible exuberance and effervescence and her unfailing sense of humour. No one knew better what it was to be *somech noflim ve-zokef kefufim* or what it was to be *harofeh lishvurei lev umechabesh le-atzvotam*, to heal the broken-hearted and bind up their wounds. If Lord Jakobovits zt'l was the expert in medical ethics, she so often was the medicine, the tonic, itself. She was full of life and she wrote other people into the Book of Life.

Three things shaped her life more than any others. First, she was the daughter of one of the truly great spiritual leaders of European Jewry, HaRav Elie Munk zt'l of Paris, a towering figure of Jewish scholarship and faith.

The second was that she was a Holocaust survivor, escaping from Nazi-occupied France to Switzerland. She never ceased to believe that Hashem had saved her for a purpose, a sacred task.

The third was her marriage, while still young, still a teenager, to HaRav Immanuel Jakobovits zt'l. Theirs was an extraordinary partnership, a sweet harmony of contrasts: he, slow and reflective, she, quick and full of energy. Together they were a *sulam mutzav artza verosho magiya hashamayma*. His head was in the stars; her feet were on the ground; and however great they were individually, together they were greater by far than the sum of their parts.

They were inseparable partners. The name they chose for this house – Immalie – says it all. But no one who knew them could doubt who was the senior partner. From the first days I knew them, I would speak to Lord Jakobovits on the phone and invariably in the background I could hear Amélie telling him what to say. He knew, no less than Avraham avinu, *Kol asher tomar elecha Sarah, shma bekolah.* "Whatever your wife says to you – do."

Together they formed one of the very greatest rabbinical partnerships of our time, first in Ireland, then in New York, then as Chief Rabbi of Britain and the Commonwealth -- but even that is an understatement because, as long-standing President of the Conference of European Rabbis, Lord

Jakobovits was in effect Chief Rabbi of Europe and Amélie was its Chief Rebbetsen. And now, having lost her, we would be bereft would were it not for three consolations.

The first is her greatest love, her family, her six children -- as precious to her as life itself -- and their many children and grandchildren. It was and is an extraordinary family, each of them carrying so much of what she was. She supported them and they supported her in a way that was wondrous. For the last ten years her grandchildren took turns to stay with her every single night.

There was a moment just a few weeks ago that was breathtaking. We were conducting a Yom HaShoa service at the Edgware shul, and at the end, to show the triumph of life over death, we showed a series of family photographs of survivors and their offspring. When the photo of Lady Amélie and her family came up on the screen, the whole shul gasped, because it told that her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren numbered well over a hundred. This morning her son Rabbi Yoel Jakobovits told me that she knew all their names and davened for them by name every single day. And as if by way of the sign from Heaven itself, last night another great-grandchild was born. Her son Rabbi Shmuel's youngest child had her first child, a daughter. *Dor holech vedor ba*. A generation goes, a new generation comes. That is our first consolation.

The second is that she is reunited with her beloved husband in heaven. *Hane-ehavim vehane'imim bechayehem uvemotam lo nifradu*. In life they were beloved and gracious, and in death, unparted. For the last eleven years there was not one conversation I had with Lady Amélie in which she did not mention her beloved Manu. I doubt whether there was a single day, a single hour, when she did not think of him. When he died she called it making aliyah, and now she too has made aliyah to join him.

The third consolation is that Hashem did not want her to grow old. Until the very end of a long life she was as the Torah says about Mosheh Rabbenu: Her eye undimmed, her natural energy unabated. About Avraham the Torah says, *Ve-Avraham zaken*. Abraham grew old. But about Sarah our sages said that at a hundred she was as if she were twenty, and at twenty as she were seven. Sarah, the mother of the Jewish people, did not grow old. Amélie Jakobovits, the mother of Anglo-Jewry, did not grow old.

What kept her young was her love of her family, her love of people, and her *emunah tehorah*, the deep, pure, unshakable faith that lived in the very air she breathed. *Shekhinah medaberet betoch gronah*. When she spoke, the Divine Presence spoke through her. She touched and transformed more lives than anyone we will know. We will never forget her, never cease to be grateful for what she did and what she was. *Yehi zikhrach baruch*. May her memory be a blessing.

Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks
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