

JANUARY 23, 1985

CLARA FRIEDMAN

TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO THE STUDENTS OF HILLEL AND THE STUDENTS OF SHAMMAI ENGAGED IN A GREAT DEBATE ABOUT WHAT YOU SAY TO A NEW HUSBAND ABOUT HIS BRIDE AT THE WEDDING PARTY. THE HILLELITES SAID NO MATTER WHAT SHE LOOKS LIKE SAY _____ "AN ELEGANT AND CHARMING BRIDE", BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT SHE SEEMS TO HER HUSBAND. THE STUDENTS OF SHAMMAI DISAGREED. THE TORAH ENJOINS US TO STAY FAR FROM FALSEHOOD. _____ "TELL IT LIKE IT IS".

IN MOST CASES THE ATTITUDES OF THE SCHOOL OF HILLEL PREVAILED AND IT IS USUALLY CONSIDERED ACCEPTABLE TO REFRAIN FROM TELLING THE WHOLE TRUTH _____ IN THE INTERESTS OF GOOD HUMAN RELATIONS.

HILLEL'S WISDOM DOES NOT HOWEVER APPLY TO THE SOLEMN MOMENT OF BIDDING A FINAL FAREWELL TO THOSE WE LOVE. MOURNERS ARE NOT STARRY-EYED GROOMS PROPERLY IDEALIZING THEIR NEW BRIDES. THEY ARE OPEN EYED AND OPEN MINDED PEOPLE FACING THE PAIN OF LOSS AND OFTEN GROPING WITH FEELINGS OF GUILT OR FEAR. TO IGNORE OR TO DISTORT THE TRUTH AT SUCH TIMES IS TO, BY IMPLICATION, CONDEMN AND THAT IS THE LAST THING WE WOULD WANT TO DO. AT SERIOUS AND SOLEMN MOMENTS LIKE THIS, HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY.

CLARA FRIEDMAN WAS WITHOUT A DOUBT A CHARACTER--A STRONG WILLED, HIGHLY INDIVIDUALISTIC PERSON WHO OFTEN MARCHED TO A DIFFERENT DRUMMER. AND LIVED IN HER OWN PARTICULAR TIME ZONE. SHE COULD BE FASCINATING, SHE COULD BE DELIGHTFUL. SHE COULD ALSO BE IMPETUOUS AND UNPREDICTABLE AND TRYING, BECAUSE OF THIS TO THOSE SHE LOVED AND WHO LOVED HER. SOMETIMES SHE WOULD FEEL THE URGE TO VISIT THE FAMILY IN SAN FRANCISCO AND JUST TAKE OFF LEAVING THE LOS ANGELES FOLKS GUESSING AS TO HER WHEREABOUTS. OR TAKE THE MATTER OF THE TELEPHONE. WHILE A RESIDENT IN HER LATTER YEARS IN THE RETIREMENT HOME CLARA REFUSED TO HAVE A PHONE IN HER ROOM. SHE REGARDED IT AS AN INTRUSION INTO HER PRIVACY. NO ARGUMENT COULD PREVAIL.

IT COULD BE DISCONNECTED. THE RING COULD BE MUTED. IT WAS A BURDEN TO HER, THE STAFF AND THE CALLERS TO HAVE HER PAGED AND TO WAIT UNTIL SHE COULD GET TO A PHONE. NONE OF THIS MATTERED. IT WAS HER ROOM AND SHE DIDN'T WANT A PHONE IN IT. PERIOD, END OF DISCUSSION.

CLARA HAD HER ROUGH EDGES. IF SHE SAW SOMEBODY VIOLATING WHAT SHE REGARDED AS PROPER STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR SHE WOULD READ OUT THE RIOT ACT. IF SHE FELT THAT TELEVISION VIEWERS WERE PLAYING THE SET TOO LOUDLY AND WERE INSENSITIVE TO HER CONVERSATIONAL PRIVILEGES, SHE WOULD WALK OVER AND WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A BY-YOUR-LEAVE TURN OFF THE MACHINE. BUT, CLARA FRIEDMAN WAS NOT A MEAN, VINDICATIVE OR DELIBERATELY ABRASIVE PERSON. ON THE CONTRARY SHE WAS, IF ANYTHING, GIVING TO A FAULT. A STREAM OF PRESENTS - SOME OF THEM REFLECTING HER OWN UNUSUAL TASTES - FLOWED FORTH FROM THE FORMIDABLE COLLECTION OF ODD ITEMS. YET SHE HERSELF FOUND IT HARD TO RECEIVE GIFTS. OFTEN GIFTS SAT UNOPENED FOR LONG PERIODS OF TIME, AND THE GIVER MIGHT RECEIVE A CALL AND BE TOLD THAT CLARA REALLY DIDN'T NEED WHAT SHE HAD BEEN GIVEN. THANKS FOR THE THOUGHT BUT COULD YOU COME BY AND PICK IT UP AND GIVE IT TO SOMEBODY WHO REALLY NEEDED IT. AND THE PERSON RECEIVING THE CALL WOULD NOT BE INSULTED. HE OR SHE WOULD KNOW THAT CLARA SINCERELY APPRECIATED THE THOUGHT BUT WAS UNCOMFORTABLE WITH HAVING THE GIFT LYING ABOUT UNUSED.

A REAL TEST OF A PERSONS CHARACTER IS THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD GOSSIP. GIVEN CLARA'S DIRECTNESS SHE WOULD RESPOND TRUTHFULLY IF ASKED ABOUT SOMETHING, BUT SHE WOULD RARELY VOLUNTEER ANY INFORMATION THAT MIGHT SEEM DEROGATORY ABOUT SOMETHING OR SOMEONE. ONCE WHEN ANNETTE WANTED TO HAVE HER TELL FAMILY HISTORY WHILE BEING TAPED SHE REFUSED, SINCE SHE DIDN'T WANT TO BE "ON RECORD" SAYING THINGS ABOUT HER FAMILY WHICH MIGHT BE CONSTRUED NEGATIVELY. IT CLASHED WITH HER SENSE OF LOYALTY AND HER DEEP

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I THINK THIS IS SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE CLARA HAD MORE THAN HER SHARE OF TRADEGY AND LOSS IN HER LIFE, AND PEOPLE HAVE BEEN MADE HARD AND ANGRY BY SUCH EXPERIENCES. BUT THIS WAS NOT HER WAY. BORN INTO A LARGE FAMILY WITH A SISTER AND FIVE BROTHERS, SHE GREW UP IN MEXICO. SHE WAS BLESSED WITH A LIVELY INTELLIGENCE, A SKILL IN LANGUAGES AND A GOOD SINGING VOICE. WHEN SHE SPARKLED SHE WAS VIVACIOUS AND DELIGHTFUL. SHE COULD SING, RECITE POETRY AND TELL FASCINATING STORIES IN YIDDISH, RUSSIAN, SPANISH OR ENGLISH. SHE MADE FRIENDS EASILY WHEN SHE CHOSE TO. HER FAMILY MOVED TO LOS ANGELES IN 1927, AND SHE MET AND MARRIED MORRIS IN 1931 WHO HAPPENED TO HAVE THE SAME NAME AS HER. HE WAS WIDOWER WITH TWO SMALL NOYS AND SOON CLARA WAS BLESSED WITH A CHILD OF HER OWN, FREDDIE. IN 1942 MORRIS DIED. TEN YEARS LATER HER SISTER-IN-LAW, ANNA PASSED AWAY AND CLARA WENT TO LOS ANGELES TO HELP HER BROTHER SAM. WHILE SHE WAS HERE SHE RECEIVED WORD THAT HER ONLY CHILD FREDDIE HAD BEEN STRICKEN WITH A VIRULENT STRAIN OF POLIO AND HAD DIED. CLARA, PUTTING GRIEF AND LOSS BEHIND HER, RAISED HER STEP-CHILDREN, SAM AND JOSEPH AS HER OWN. WHEN THEY REACHED MATURITY SHE CAME BACK TO LOS ANGELES TO HER FAMILY AND TO THE FAMILY BUSINESS AND FOR THE REST OF HER LIFE STAYED CLOSE TO HER FAMILY AND FRIENDS HERE.

CLARA HAD ONGOING PHYSICAL PROBLEMS AND FOUGHT RECURRING BATTLES WITH PERIODS OF DEPRESSION. BUT SHE WAS NEVER A KVETCHER -A COMPLAINER-WHO DUMPED HER WOES ON OTHERS AND BEMONED GOD OR LUCK OR WHATEVER. IF SHE WAS ANGRY OR JEALOUS SHE NEVER SHOWED IT. SHE TOOK GREAT PRIDE IN THE SUCCESS OF HER BROTHERS AND IN THE PROSPERITY OF THE FAMILY AND WAS NOT ABOVE BOASTING NOW AND THEN ABOUT THEM. BUT SHE REGULARLY APPLIED HER KNITTING SKILLS, NOT ONLY TO HER FAMILY, BUT ALSO TO CHILDREN IN ISRAEL AS PART OF A GROUP THAT MADE AND SENT CLOTHING THERE. UNKNOWN TO MOST SHE ALSO MADE

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REGULAR AND SECRET DONATIONS TO A WIDE VARIETY OF CHARITIES.

CLARA WAS BRIGHT AND PERCEPTIVE. IT WAS ONLY A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO THAT SHE ARGUED FIRMLY WITH HER DOCTORS THAT HER DIGESTIVE TROUBLES WERE NOT PSTCHOSOMATIC, AND SHE TURNED OUT TO BE RIGHT. IT WAS A CANCER OF THE COLON WHICH SHE SUCCESSFULLY OVERCAME. NO WONDER THE DOCTORS AND NURSES REGARDED HER WITH A COMBINATION OF AFFECTION AND RESPECT.

SHE STUBBORNLY REFUSED TO GO INTO A NURSING HOME REGARDING IT AS AN AFFRONT TO HER INDEPENDENCE. IF SHE COULDN'T DRIVE ANY MORE SHE WOULD GET AROUND BY BUS. ALONG WITH HER BROTHER SAM WHO DIED IN 1979, SHE WAS ASSOCIATED FOR MANY YEARS WITH HOLLYWOOD TEMPLE BETH EL, COMING TO PLAY BINGO, AND ATTENDING SABBATH SERVICES REGULARLY WITH HER DEAR FRIENDS, SAM AND SARAH.

GOD BLESSED HER WITH 80 YEARS WE KNOW OF AND MAYBE A FEW MORE WE DON'T KNOW ABOUT. THEY CONTAINED MORE THAN THEIR MEASURE OF LOSS AND PAIN AND TRAGEDY, BUT THEY ALSO CONTAINED BROAD PATCHES OF LIGHT AND JOY. CLARA WAS NOT DEFEATED OR BROKEN BY HER TRIALS, SHE FACED STORM AND SUNSHINE WITH IMMENSE DIGNITY AND DEPARTED IN A MANNER COMPATIBLE WITH HER IMPETUOUS AND DETERMINED CHARACTER. WITHOUT ANY INDICATION OR INTIMATION SHE DIED QUIETLY IN HER SLEEP WITH NO TRACE OF PAIN OR CONTORTION. SHE WAS SPARED THE LINGERING ILLNESS AND LOSS OF FUNCTION, WHICH I SUSPECT, SHE FEARED WORSE THAN DEATH ITSELF. SHE HAS GONE TO A WELL-EARNED REST AND OUR WORLD WILL BE LESS INTERESTING AND EXCITING NOW THAT SHE IS GONE ON TO WELL EARNED REST. SHE WILL BE MISSED.

MAY HER SOUL BE BOUND UP IN THE BOND OF ETERNAL LIFE. AMEN.