

זכרו תורת משה עבדי

Hesped for Rabbi Moshe Dovid Tendler

Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman

We are here today to mourn the loss and reflect on the life and legacy of Rabbi Moshe Dovid Tendler, a senior rosh yeshiva at Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, Professor of Biology and former chair of the Biology department in Yeshiva College, the Rabbi Isaac and Bella Tendler Professor of Jewish Medical Ethics.

Rabbi Tendler represented everything that Yeshiva University stands for. In the world of Torah u'Maddah, Rabbi Tender removed the vav and fully integrated both aspects into his life. It was holistic, it was who he was.

Allow me to explain:

Moreinu ve-Rabbeinu Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik famously developed an approach to the story of creation in which there are two archetypes of Adam. Adam 1 is the scientist, he is the creator, he brings the world under his microscope and within his control – פרו ורבו ומלאו את הארץ – וכבשוה. Adam 2, however is the man of faith, of solitude, וינחהו בגן עדן לעבדה ולשמרה. His goal is to live his life in God's garden, serving, protecting, alone with Hashem and pursuing a life of oneness with God.

In the way the Rav outlines these typologies there is a bifurcation within each individual as we are mandated to exemplify both aspects in our lives. And this is a typology and bifurcation to which we, as students of the Rav, are very familiar.

But to me, this is not the world of Rabbi Moshe Dovid Tendler. For I do not think of him as bifurcated at all, instead as one exemplary whole.

And in this sense the better model for us is after the creation story. After Adam is created, expelled from Gan Eden, builds a family, and experiences life, he is described in a different way. It is not as a typology וכבשוה vs. לעבדה ולשמרה but instead as a book:

זה ספר תולדות אדם.....בדמות אלקים עשה אותו

Here Adam is not described with any verbs--a conqueror, a protector--but instead as a story, as a book. And this in fact is our goal--to live an integrated life where all of our disparate and multifaceted accomplishments are merged together to become a part of one cohesive narrative as an eved Hashem. And this is what Rabbi Tendler showed us. He wasn't two warring distinct typologies, he wasn't some days Adam 1 and other days Adam 2, he wasn't a Rosh Yeshiva who

also happened to be a biologist or a biologist who also happened to be a Rosh Yeshiva. He was Rabbi Tendler a man who lived a holistic story and organic life. A person who wove together different expertise, interests, passions, and ambitions into one unified story as a true eved Hashem.

And it is a story that is as unique as it is spectacular.

A renowned Rosh Yeshiva who would teach be-iyun on the highest levels, who also taught biology to the undergraduate students, microbiology to the advanced biology majors, and was a research scientist in his own fully functioning lab. How many talmidei chachamim do we know who can masterfully speak about a ketzos in the morning and lead in the afternoon a research team to discover a cure for cancer! He was a rabbi to his community, a guide to hundreds of medical students who he showed how to halakhically navigate through the maze of medical school and residency, and a mentor to his thousands of students.

He pioneered the field of medical halakhah. In fact, when he began his career, he was the field. He was current and active in the latest developments. He was the most sought-after speaker at every conference on the topic. Most especially due to his vast knowledge but also because of his engaging, spontaneous, and at time even humorous formulations. He was a talmud chakham with a real personality.

And he had an incredible reach. He testified before congress a number of time, was in the leadership of several major medical ethics associations and societies, and as the conduit to Rav Moshe's medical she'elot - he partnered in writing the very teshuvot on which the entire Torah world bases itself.

There have been in Jewish history those rare individuals who were great rabbis who were also renowned doctors. Some wrote halakhic works without any reference to medicine, and some authored medical works without referencing halakhah, Rambam's medical treatises come to mind.

For Rabbi Tendler, one could not find one without the other. His Torah classes were infused with his deep reservoir of scientific knowledge and his science classes were infused with Torah.

There was no bifurcation. There was no "vav". Zeh sefer toldot ha-adam, there was a unified holistic individual who developed his tzelem elokim to its greatest possible capacity.

On a personal level, Rabbi Tendler was always warm and generous to me from my days as a student to when I returned back to YU today. I experienced directly his grace, kindness, guidance and insight. And at our Yeshiva, he was with us for over 80 years, from his days as a student in

high school throughout his legendary life and career as a Professor, Rabbi, Rosh Yeshiva, as a father, grandfather, and great grandfather.

For all the ways in which his story helped us shape our own, he will be sorely missed but his legacy and memory will continue to be remembered in our Yeshiva and by all those who knew him and were inspired by him.

תהא נשמתו צרורה בצרור החיים