

Sunday, December 9, 2007

**Rabbi Shmuel Kawior leaves the planet; great man from a passing generation.**

Rabbi Shmuel Kawior was born in Lomza, Poland, highlighted here in dark blue. (Image from public domain.)  
When Jay Marks and I opened our law firm over nine years ago, we often plotted strategy over falafel masterfully prepared by chef Momi (sp?) at Max's restaurant up the street. Sometimes on our visits, we had the good fortune to see and speak with Rabbi Shmuel Kawior, who would supervise the operations of various area kosher establishments to assure they were keeping kosher. When talking with him, I would set aside my aversion to helping the meat industry, and my dissent from the sexism that is part of Orthodox Judaism. (A good friend from law school -- and fellow vegan -- who veered towards Orthodox Judaism a few years ago unconvincingly explained to me that it is not sexism, but is instead a recognition of different roles of men and women in religious life. That sounds like sexism to me.)  
Rabbi Kawior -- in his late seventies or early eighties when we first met him -- was like a warm grandfather to all. He seemed never to be in a hurry. He made the time to talk when approached, and sometimes would approach first. He spoke Polish and Yiddish; his English spoke of the languages he was born with.  
One day, I was driving down Colesville Road to my office, and saw Rabbi Kawior waiting at the southbound bus stop. I stopped my car a few yards ahead, and offered him a ride, which I thought would just be to the bus station a mile down the road. He said he was going to Rockville, which was closer to a thirty minute roundtrip there and back to my office. I had work waiting there to be done, but decided that if I had to work a half hour later as a result, I would. As I drove to Rockville's Kosher Mart, the rabbi told me a bit about being from Poland and about his son who is a lawyer; time flew fast. I opened the door for him at our destination. He got out, and kissed me thanks on the cheek, the old school way.  
I saw him at least once or twice more at the same bus stop, and each time felt compelled, rather than obligated, to give him a ride, except for perhaps one time when I could not rearrange my schedule to do so. Each time we spoke in the car or at a kosher restaurant or market, my life was enriched more.  
Then, I stopped seeing Rabbi Kawior as often, as my eating moved away from such heavy food as deep-fried falafel balls, as delicious as they are. A few days ago, I bumped into a fellow lawyer who eats at the same falafel restaurant more frequently than I and asked if he knew about the rabbi's well-being. He responded that the rabbi had passed away around a year ago, of old age.  
I did not know much about Rabbi Kawior beyond what I recount above. I searched high and low on the Internet for more about him, and finally found a treasure trove of an article here in the Washington Jewish Week. The article includes the following about Rabbi Kawior:  
"Rabbi Shmuel Kawior of Silver Spring, a scholar who helped establish standards for kashrut supervision in Greater Washington, died Dec. 26. He was in his late 80s.  
"Born in Lomza, in prewar Poland, Kawior studied and received rabbinical ordination at "the greatest institutions in the world," said Rabbi Yitzchok Breitowitz, a friend of Kawior's for many years and his rabbi at Woodside Synagogue in Silver Spring.  
"Kawior studied under prominent Torah scholars, Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman at the Baranowitz Yeshiva and Rabbi Boruch Ber Leibowitz at the Kaminetz Yeshiva, both in Poland.  
"He survived the Holocaust in Siberia although his entire family was killed. He immigrated to the United States after World War II, living initially in New York, where he was certified as a shochet, a kosher slaughter, by Rabbi Yosef Henkin."  
The following descriptions about Rabbi Kawior's persona hit on what endeared me so much to him:  
"In spite of his great eminence, he was friendly and approachable. He projected a sense of great, great friendliness and love of all people, without exception," said [his rabbi], adding that the staffers at the hotels he supervised, including the dishwashers, all loved him.  
"He had the ability to communicate with people of all walks of life, whatever their status," Kawior's son, Shraga, said. "He was a modest person," who had declined requests to be an honoree on several occasions."  
Rabbi Kawior is an inspiration to me to do what the Dalai Lama does, which is to connect positively with others, and to speak with everyone the same. I miss you, Rabbi Kawior. Thank you for you. Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in Jon's news &amp; views at 00:00