

## IN MEMORY OF ZE'EV FALK

We mourn and we reflect upon the death of our intellectual companion and friend, Ze'ev Falk, on Shabbat, September 19, 1998. It is both blessed and painful that he died very quickly after learning that he had a brain tumor, painful in that we did not have the time to say the goodbye we would have liked from half a world away. While Ze'ev was in his mid 70s when he turned his face forever to G-d, for many of us at the *Journal* who knew him, it is as if a much younger man has been taken from our midst, a scholar (we might say of others) just reaching his prime. For indeed, having lived a series of lives, as a rabbi and rabblouser within Israel's Orthodox community, a beloved law teacher at Hebrew University, the rector of the Seminary of Judaic Studies, author of numerous texts on law and religion and Jewish law, and a reverent poet, when we made Ze'ev's acquaintance through David Cobin of Hamline University School of Law, it seemed to us as if Ze'ev was just getting started. He had lectured all over the globe, from Heidelberg and Moscow to Sao Paulo, New York, and Berkeley, but he was far from finished, though he worked with the instinct of someone who knew his days were numbered. Shortly before his death, he gave lectures in Japan comparing Jewish law and Japanese religions, and he was working in the U.S. on an international study team on religious views of women's rights, to name only two projects we knew of.

Indeed, Ze'ev approached learning with the delight of a person who was being given a tremendous gift—every single time he encountered another person, mighty or lowly as he or she might be in the world's terms. He would engage a junior high school Talmud Torah class with the same pious enthusiasm and respect as he would the most distinguished law and religion scholars on the planet. When I had the temerity to severely edit some of his first articles for the *Journal of Law and Religion*, he reacted not as an accomplished scholar irritated at the impudence of a relatively younger editor, but as a student, eager to learn all he could about how he could convey his message to a new audience.

One of Ze'ev's ongoing missions toward the end of his life was to rebind Jewish intellectual tradition and spirituality back

together in Jewish seminaries and in our common life. What he believed, he embodied: Ze'ev's intellectual and spiritual lives were rarely separated. He was as much himself singing the Shabbat prayers with his beloved wife Mirjam (a source of his energy and delight) as then launching into a reflection upon a Biblical text, or an academic article that related to it in some way. Similarly, he had set himself a mission to bring before the world that would listen a larger understanding of the human person as *b'tzelem elokim* (*imago dei*), a vision that would find him equally at home in Reform, Conservative and Orthodox synagogues, or raising a devotion to G-d among his Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist friends. It was a vision that would lead him to demand for women first and foremost a place within the spiritual life of the Jewish community among all of the demands for equal respect that he made for them and for others left out of the community. Remembering the need to be open to G-d as all who are outside the world's comforts are, he wrote:

### The Sukkah

This week we lived  
 In a temporary dwelling  
 Like a chance wanderer  
 We were exiled from our  
 . . . home.

We dwelled in the sukkah  
 Its ceiling open  
 To the eyes of God,  
 Without luxury  
 It was similar to  
 A poor Jew's.

Shall we return to the home—the castle  
 And again from tomorrow  
 Shall we close the opening  
 So as not to appear before  
 . . . His face  
 So as not to approach His  
 . . . children?

God save  
And allow us the privilege  
. . . of dwelling  
In the sukkah in the heart  
All the days of the year.<sup>1</sup>

Ze'ev's approach was not simply intellectual; it was consistent with the tradition of wisdom: just as he was made Ya'qir Yerushalaim, elder of Jerusalem, in recognition of his place as an elder of community life, so he was an elder of intellectual life in law and religion. That we at the *Journal* came upon him so late in his life is more a sad reflection of the insularity of academic circles, even in law and religion, than of his attempts to reach out to the world from his distinctive place in Jewish life.

We will be publishing some of Ze'ev's last work in the next issue of the *Journal*, so in some ways this tradition of conversation with him will continue. But not to have him with us, to experience the delight of his piety, his daily kindness, and his engagement in learning ever more about the human experience with G-d is hard.

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Co-editor

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