

Agecroft cemetery.

February 1st 2018 | 16th Shvat 5778

It was cold and we were stood at the Ohel, and many people in their seventies and eighties... and I wanted to honour my father, but also not speak for too long. So the text below is what I had in my hand, but I didn't actually say the sections that are not in bold.

The text also doesn't include the several different moments that I just started crying: prompted by what I had just said, or what I was about to say.

At those points I stopped speaking for a few moments.

Those are the parts of the text – the white letters, in a sense, rather than the black letters – in which of course I was sharing most deeply who my Dad was, and what I was trying to say....

My Dad was born in 1932 in north Manchester and apart from when he was away for National Service he lived his whole life in Jewish North Manchester. You could drive between any place he lived – and he lived in just four homes in over 80 years, - in less than twenty minutes.

My Dad was like that. He was calm and quiet and steady. He wasn't confused. He was incredibly solid. Incredibly consistent.

My mum used to say that Dad would happily eat the same meal for the whole year. He liked traditional Manchester Jewish food. Vosht, egg & chips. Or fish and chips.

He never had seconds. If we were out, for pudding he'd have apple pie and vanilla ice cream. He didn't really see any need for any other flavor of ice cream.

He grew up poor, in a house with no central heating and an outhouse for a toilet.

Yet he had, by his own recounting, only happy memories of his childhood.

He was the beloved youngest child in his family – his parents, my Bobbie & Zaydie – Bert & Esther; and his older sister and brother, Jean & Ivor.

They loved him, and he loved them, and they were close their whole lives.

The enduring gift of his upbringing was that he was entirely happy in his own skin. The interests and values that defined my dad at 17 seem not to have been different from those he cared about when he was 77.

My dad was an accountant.

He worked as an accountant for 44 years and I don't think he took more than two weeks' vacation at a time, all those years - and never wanted to.

I don't think anyone then or now thinks of accountancy as being sexy or very important.

And yet my Dad was the accountancy equivalent of an old-fashioned country doctor.

He knew his clients and he looked after them and he cared about them.

He and Barry Halpern founded Halpern, Savage & Co, and that was his job for over 30 years - including when the IRA blew up their offices in Manchester, which he just took calmly in his stride, because he took pretty much everything calmly in his stride.

As a kid and as a teenager he went to Rebbe Balkind's famous cheder and yeshiva.

Both from his family and from his teachers he had a kind of core Jewishness that was as obvious to him and as central and no-big-deal in his life as water to a fish.

Just one story from when he was a kid:

He went to shul on the Sunday morning, the day after his bar mitzvah, to get his tefillin, which he'd left in shul by mistake the Thursday before.

And, in the story he liked to tell, Rebbe Balkind stood up after the Sunday morning services and said,

Most bar mitzvah boys come to shul and lay tefillin in preparation for their bar mitzvah. But there are not so many kids like Gerry Savage, who are here, davening and laying tefillin, the day after their bar mitzvah.

My Dad thought the story was amusing because my Dad, of course, didn't consider himself especially *frum*.

But Rebbe Balkind was in fact quite right about my Dad and who he was.

Maybe another kid would have just left his tefillin in shul, or picked them up some other time.

But the absolute essence of my Dad was to do the right thing, and to do it on time, and he did this so steadily and quietly and consistently that no one even thought it was a big deal. My Dad made the minyan if they needed a minyan - his whole life.

He worked every day with money because he was good with numbers, but he never really cared about money. He cared about his clients, and he helped out friends and family members all through his career, including into his retirement.

He lived in a nicer house than the one he grew up in, and then a nicer house than that, and we had a car and then two cars, and we went on vacation, and he saw his kids and then his grandkids go to college and grad school - and what more did he need?

My Dad lived through the sixties and seventies and eighties, when so much changed in the world, and many of his own peer group started to make different choices.

You no longer had to do something because your parents had done it.

But that was not my Dad.

His lifetime commitment to the Jewish community and to Israel was just a single straight line, consistent in every way.

He was treasurer of JNF. He was treasurer of the shul.

I don't think he ate treif – pork or shellfish – a single time in his life.

He went to shul every week, and not just when we were kids but essentially all of his life, until in the last few years he was too infirm.

The years that he was in mourning for his father and his mother, my Bobbie & Zaydie, he said kaddish every day. I remember getting up on miserable rainy cold mornings before school when I was 15 and driving to shul, every day, for shacharit. There wasn't a bone in my Dad's body that ever conceived of not doing that. He used to sit next to Gerry Morris in shul, and Daniel & Robin – and me, as a kid; that was how I grew up. **Shul with Dad, every Shabbat morning.**

Oh, and in the afternoon Old Trafford, from the age of 10 or so until I went to university – every home game, with Harold Harris and Bethel Rosenberg, and Bethel's kids, in the old G Stand.

Dad took me to the FA Cup Final in 1976, and in '77 and in '79.

Dad was there at the famous Cup Final in 1948 – he was 15 years old; I've no idea how he got there - when United beat Blackpool 4-2, their first time in the Cup Final in 39 years. And one of my earliest memories was of being able to stay up late in 1968, when United won the European Cup Final – my Dad was there at Wembley that night, as well.

We only found out relatively recently that my Dad was actually born Gerald Sayevitch.

We thought the change from Sayevitch to Savage happened in my Zaydie's time.

It seems like he was known as Gerry Savage from when he was a baby; but legally he was Gerald Sayevitch, until his teens.

Sayevich was the anglicization of *Tziyevich* – and “vich” is *son of*, and “Tzi” is *tzion*.

So my Dad was really Gerald (Gedalia) *Ben Tzion*.

After we learned this, Paula called her next kid Akiva Ben-Zion Savage Cohen.

I said, *you called him Ben-tzion twice* – and she smiled and said *yeah!*

It places my Dad's life in perspective to remember that Tzion was still just a dream, with a nightmare first to cross through, when my Dad was born.

When he was living at Shirley Road, as a kid, and going to Central High School and Bishop Street Shul and Rebbe Balkind's cheder – England was at war, and Jews were being massacred across the continent, and if history had gone otherwise we none of us might be here today. Dad was already 15 years old when David Ben Gurion proclaimed the birth of the State of Israel.

Exactly fifty years later, I was living in Israel when my Dad was 65 and for his birthday I invited him out for ten days.

It was the only time, actually, I was away just with my Dad, as opposed to Mum-and-Dad. He was very Dad.

I booked us in for three days to what was to me a really beautiful and very spare - and very off-the-grid - retreat center, Sukkah baMidbar.

On the second day there he said: *well, this is very nice; but can we go to a proper hotel now?*

Which we did.

But I also remember Dad at the kotel.

The kotel to me is a place of great significance, but I never really *feel* anything there. But my Dad put on a tallis and a pair of tefillin and he davened and he *cried*. Absolutely cried. It was very intense.

So my Dad had this incredibly strong commitment to Jewish life, and he'd grown up in a very traditional world. But, his whole life, he was never dogmatic, never argumentative. In the argument between chesed and din, my dad was 100% chesed.

There was a story I love from maybe 15 years ago, when Mum and Dad were on a cruise:

There was a room allocated by the cruise line as a multi-denominational space, for anyone to use.

So my Dad goes there, early Friday evening, the day after the cruise set off, to see if there were Friday night services. And a few people had shown up.

Someone comes up to Dad and says - *You look like the kind of person who could daven - will you lead Friday night services?*

So Dad says yes.

But then he looks around and he said,

Well, actually, there isn't a minyan here - there are just eight men, and we need ten. And the guy he was talking to said,

Well, there aren't 10 men, but there are more than 10 people here.

And I said to Dad, *so what did you do?*

And Dad said - *well, so I led the davening....*

That story - it just tells you everything you need to know about my Dad.

And about so many of the values that Paula and I have internalized, that we just take for granted.

He cared about Jewish tradition and he cared about people.

I want to say a word about Mum and Dad.

No kid can ever really know their parents' relationship.

My Mum and Dad knew each other for 60 years, they were married for 58.

I'm sure they had their issues. They remind me, now as I think about it, of Tevye and Golda in Fiddler on the Roof? [Sing:] "*But do I love her? Does he love me?*"

What I saw, was just how amazingly they cared for each other and looked after each other.

They're different characters, they have different interests, somewhat different values... and yet they looked after each other – and us, for that matter, but especially each other – with such incredible tenderness and kindness and looking-out-for-each-other-ness. Watching my Mum in the last year or so feeding my Dad lunch each day with a sippy cup... seeing her get teary in these last two weeks.... It has been very moving.

My Dad was an amazing and wonderful man.

And my Mum is a wonderful and amazing woman.

I want to say a couple of words about my relationship with my Dad.

When I was a kid he wasn't physical – we didn't hug or kiss.

And I fought with him for at least a couple of years when I was 15 and 16.

But at some point when I was in my mid-twenties and living in London I came back to Manchester and hugged my Dad.

And from that time, in the 1980s, until he was too bedridden and couldn't – every time that I arrived and every time I left, we hugged each other; and every single time he got tear-y.

It was just so clear that he really loved me, and I really loved him, and it was always carried in that moment.

So...to end.

As a teenager I thought of myself as very different from my father.

And in temperament we are quite different.

But as each year has gone by since my twenties, as each decade has gone by, I look in the mirror and I not only see myself starting to look like him; I also see that the things that are important to me were defined by him.

The Jewish community. Israel. Manchester United. Numbers. Reading.

Reading the papers.

Reading even if other people around you are doing other things.

Trying to do the right thing.

He was a lifelong Labour party member, and turned down the opportunity to be a Labour councillor in the seventies – though he didn't live to see the current Labour Party, and I'm sad not to have been able to ask him, in recent years, whether he'd have voted for it or not.

He was incredibly modest and unassuming and he wouldn't dream of telling anyone – me or Paula included – what to do or not do.

But, lo and behold, if I look at who we are and some of the things we each get complimented for – I think that every one of them traces back, pretty directly, to my Dad

or to my Mum or to both of them.

So: *Goodbye, Dad...*

My Dad was born on Rosh Chodesh Elul, and in the end he died on Tu b'Shvat.

**Elul is about teshuva, about being your best self.
My Dad was his best self every single day of the year.
Modest and kind and helping people in his quiet way.**

And Tu b'Shvat is - well, first of all, it was actually, if you think about it, the end of the tax year, in Second Temple times. So my Dad, the lifelong accountant, died on the ancient Jewish tax day.

**And Tu b'Shvat is also, of course, about the cycle of life, the tree of life. Etz Chaim.
My Dad was the tree of my life.
A wonderful wonderful tree.
Growing from rich soil and strong roots.
Giving shade and protection and kindness to everyone he knew, to everyone who knew him.**

***Y'hi zichron avi mori livracha* - may the the memory of my father, my teacher be remembered as a great blessing to all who knew him.**

Gerry Savage
Gedaliah ben Avraham Aryeh v'Esther
1st September 1932 - 30th January 2018
30th Av 5692 - 15th Shvat 5778

Donations in honour of or in memory of Gerry may be made to thefed.org.uk, which is the parent organization of Heathlands, a truly wonderful organization where he spent the last period of his life; or to Hazon, at hazon.org, towards the Gerry Savage Fruit Orchard / Edible Forest, which is being established at Isabella Freedman.