

דברים לזכרה של ציפי

נחמיה פולן

It deeply pains me to hear that Tsippi Kauffman has passed away. Tsippi was a wonderful colleague. I had the honor of participating with her at several international conferences on aspects of Hasidism. Her presentations and comments brought clarity to complex topics and sometimes fractious discussions. She was an attentive and respectful listener, and her observations were always penetrating, furthering joint efforts at arriving at new syntheses.

Tsippi focused our attention on neglected hasidic tales, personalities and practices, uncovering their scholarly implications and wider significance. She combined imaginative reach and astute readings with control of sources and methodological rigor. Her writing is characterized by expository clarity and stylistic grace.

One feature of her work that deserves special emphasis is the quality of equilibrium. Endowed with powerful intellectual gifts, Tsippi always deployed those gifts in a balanced and judicious manner. She avoided being overly swayed by fashionable theories, and arrived time and time again at a scholarly position of thoughtful balance and equipoise. In my view, this quality—what I would call critical sobriety and judicious temperament—is what makes for enduring scholarship in the long run and gives me absolute confidence that her legacy of deep and thoughtful writing will continue to influence the field for many years to come.

These qualities were particularly in evidence in her writing on gender issues in Hasidism. She surveyed earlier work respectfully but critically, and showed how we must move beyond binary characterizations and simplistic formulations, whether motivated by pietistic defensiveness on the one hand, or scholarly skepticism on the other. Drawing upon her own work on the Ba'al Shem Tov, she challenged us to soften rigid boundaries and engage 'a more fluid and flexible space for identity definition' that would 'blur binary boundaries of sacred and profane, central and marginal, spirituality and materiality, ... to make place for all those seeking closeness to God.' We would do well to pursue her lead of embracing the 'Ba'al Shem Tov's vision and the religious longing for a place where boundaries (including those of gender) fall away.'

Tsippi exemplified how academic scholarship can be a calling, a path of moral integrity and spiritual nobility as well as a courageous quest for truth.

In her personal interactions, Tsippi was a model of kindness, generosity and genuine humility--all while expressing her views with clarity and conviction.

We have lost a great friend and a noble spirit--*haval al de-avdin!*

Nehemia Polen--23 Elul 5779/September 23, 2019