Dr Eric L. Friedland z'l

(20 January 1940–16 January 2020)

Andrew Goldstein

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Eric Friedland was born in New York City in 1941. Soon after birth it was found he had defective hearing and his mother faced hardship as his father left home six months later. His mother moved to Boston to be near relatives. She made the decision that Eric would not learn sign language as she said this would destine him to move largely among deaf people. Instead he became proficient in lip reading. Initially he did go to a school for the hearing impaired, but his life took off when he moved to Hebrew Teachers College in Boston. Here was founded his deep and wide Jewish knowledge, as all lessons were taught in Hebrew. He graduated from Brookline High School in 1957 and from Boston University in 1960.

Eric pursued doctoral studies at Brandeis University, earning his PhD in the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies in 1967 with a dissertation on 'The Historical and Theological Development of the Non-Orthodox Prayerbooks in the United States', and in 1968 moved to Dayton, Ohio, where he was appointed Professor of Judaic Studies at the United Theological Seminary, University of Dayton and Wright State University. This was a unique position teaching courses in three institutions: a Protestant seminary, a Catholic university and a liberal arts college under the aegis of a single professorship. Not surprisingly, this led to a life-long commitment to interfaith study and understanding on top of his devotion to Jewish teaching and study. Following Vatican II Council there was new interest in teaching Judaism to Christians at a university level and Eric had arrived in Dayton at the right time. Later he also developed an interest in Islam. Following a public lecture he gave on Maimonides, a number of Muslims became admirers and close friends. He came to study with a Muslim physician the Qur'an in Arabic and Maimonides in Hebrew. In fact, three devoted Muslims became his key caregivers in his later years together with a Chabad rabbi who conducted his funeral. As a tribute to Eric, Drs Wayel and Ramziah Azmeh and two

other Muslims together with Rabbi Shmuel Klatzkin are meeting to study Heschel's *The Prophets*. Eric was indeed an ecumenical scholar and inspiring and courageous human being.

As well as having to cope with his hearing impairment, in his late fifties Eric developed a muscle-wasting disease that was a puzzle to his physicians. They wanted to see if there were clues in his family history but, with the death of his mother, Eric had lost touch with his remaining family. He hired a private detective, who discovered he had a half-sister (who happened to be married to a Conservative rabbi!). This led to Eric having contact with a few distant relatives and although this did help diagnose the disease, sadly nothing could be done about it. About fifteen years ago, I flew out to Dayton to study liturgy with Eric and was surprised to see him at the airport walking with a Zimmer frame. But when we got into his car he turned the rear-view mirror round towards my face so he could lip-read as we drove to his home. I was scared out of my wits, but this was typical of Eric's ingenious way of coping with his disabilities.

It was liturgy that brought us together. When Rabbi John D. Rayner z'l was editing *Siddur Lev Chadash* he had been in contact with Eric, and when Rabbi Charles Middleborough and I embarked on editing *Machzor Ruach Chadashah* we asked Eric if he would be our consultant. He readily agreed and hence my first visit to Dayton.

Eric was a renowned expert on Jewish liturgy and especially Progressive Jewish liturgy. From the earliest German and American Reform prayerbooks to the latest innovative editions, Eric seemed to know them by heart. He had in his collection a variety of obscure prayerbooks produced by individual rabbis but was also an expert on the rabbinic texts and theory of Jewish liturgy. His Boston upbringing gave him a special interest in the Anglo-Jewish traditions and the liturgy of the Reform and Liberal movements.

In time I came to send him my sermons, lectures and articles and he was an honest yet positive critic of my grammar, style and fact. In fact, his own articles were fascinating to read, his use of English full of colour and innovation.

In a review of Rabbi Chaim Stern's *Paths of Faith* entitled 'Chaim Stern's Swan Song', he starts with reference to the draft of the first *Union Prayerbook* by Isaac S. Moses and continues, 'Analogously, at the end of the twentieth century the recreation of the *Union Prayer Book* was the work largely of Chaim Stern, who blended the ritual dissonances of American Reform Judaism into a polyphony. His poetic and reactional gifts have been given due recognition across denominational boundaries'.¹

Eric wrote many articles on Jewish liturgy but his main work came in 1997 with the collection called *'Were Our Mouths Filled With Song'*:

Studies in Liberal Jewish Liturgy.² In it Eric explored a number of American Reform prayerbooks, including David Einhorn's *Olath Tamid* and Marcus Jastrow's *Abodath Israel*, before covering a range of topics, with chapters intriguingly headed: 'Messianism in the Progressive Passover Haggadah', 'Mystical Influences in Jewish Liturgical Renewal', 'Gates of Prayer in Historical-Critical Perspectives'.

Eric was especially interested in Progressive liturgies in Great Britain, and though he worked on two Liberal Jewish prayerbooks he was equally interested in British Reform liturgy and was in regular contact with Rabbi Dr Jonathan Magonet. In 'Hebrew Liturgical Creativity in British Reform', having given an insightful background to Rev. David Woolf Marks, the first minister of West London Synagogue, he continues: 'At first glance the premier edition of *Forms of Prayer* is no more than the Sephardic rite, streamlined by fits and starts. A closer look divulges individual features that bear careful study. One of the most conspicuous examples is the Aramaic Kaddish Hebraized from beginning to end'. Having discussed Marks's translation, he concludes: 'the old Aramaic Kaddish resurfaces (... in 1952 and 1965 ...) after having been hushed up for over a century'.³

The long chapter on British Reform liturgy includes insightful asides about the nature and history of the Movement.

During the days of Queen Victoria, the Bible formed a universal staple whose diction and cadences infiltrated and shaped the English tongue in diverse ways ... David W. Marks and the congregation he pastored all his adult life attest in their beloved *Forms of Prayer* a fervent attachment to the Bible ... Saturated and able as Marks was in the language of the Tanakh and the liturgy, he was not all that formally trained Judaically in the academic sense. Hence the structural changes he allowed were, from a scholarly standpoint, now and then arbitrary and erratic, and his Hebrew not free from desultory blunders.⁴

In a chapter entitled 'High Holy Day Liturgy in Great Britain and Israel', Eric shows his appreciation of the liturgy created by Magonet and Blue:

Deserving of note are several prayers by co-editor Lionel Blue. Dispersed throughout the prayer book, they are remarkably frank, direct and – when not coy – poignant, like the one at the start of the *selihot* section during the *ne'ilah*: 'Lord, I do not want to pester or repeat again or chant my list of sins once more. You knew the list before this day began. I recited them more for myself than for You. In fact, You know those which are still unknown to me, sins which I hide from myself or was too stupid to see'.⁵

At a moving tribute to Rabbi John Rayner z'l at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue on 4 July 2010, Eric said:

John's and my correspondence began on July 5th 1963. This was during my college years, when I cracked books at the historic Boston Public Library overlooking Copley Square. In its reading room I sat at an oblong table facing the library's extensive collection of liturgies, Christian, Jewish and Muslim. When I came across the *Liberal Jewish Prayerbook* edited by Israel I. Mattuck in the 1920s, I was instantly struck by the beauty, eloquence and candour of the English prayers, by the wealth of religious literary material not normally found in the *Siddur*, and contrastingly, by the quirky arrangement of the familiar prayers.

He wrote to the senior rabbi of the LJS and was surprised to get a detailed reply (how typically John Rayner) –'it blew my mind that a rabbi of a leading congregation would take time out of a busy schedule to reply in detail to the inquiry of a total stranger from overseas, let alone a junior at an American university'. Thus began a scholarly interchange and friendship.

Let me conclude with two contrasting comments arising out of Eric's defective hearing. In a sermon Eric gave on Shabbat Shuvah 2003 entitled 'To Be Deaf and Jewish', a commentary on the *Vidui* or Confession, he noted:

The subtle and not-so-subtle abuse and humiliations suffered by the deaf and the hard-of-hearing from the hearing world, even in these 'enlightened' times are steady and non-stop. When you don't allow us to see your face when you speak, you literally cut off communication and leave those of us who do read lips at a loss. When you dismiss or don't tap our proven abilities and talents because you automatically assume we're not up to it, we're deeply pained. When you hear our rough, deaf accent and get it into your head that we are indeed as stupid as we sound, we know we are being horribly misjudged. The '*Al chet*' should impel you to re-examine and reconsider your attitudes and behaviors to fellow humans who are physically challenged as well as those who are able-bodied. Not to do so is to desecrate the divine image in us and thereby, in Jewish theological terms, to profane the name of God.⁶

Eric's anger is understandable. He was a man who faced so many difficulties in his life and yet usually met you with an almost childlike charm. His initials were E.L.F. but there was nothing elflike about him; he was a large, warm, bearlike man. His interests were not just in Jewish liturgy, but in everything he came across, religious or not. On one visit to England I took him to St. Albans Abbey. It was soon after, late in life, he

had had a cochlear implant which restored some of his hearing. It happened to be Evensong and it was such a pleasure to see him in ecstasy. To hear, for the first time, an English Cathedral choir singing the traditional service he knew so well. For a man born deaf it was amazing to realise his deep appreciation of music to add to his wide knowledge of history, literature ... well, everything.

Rabbi Dr Andrew Goldstein was ordained by LBC in 1970, is Emeritus Rabbi of Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue, President of Liberal Judaism and co-editor of *Machzor Ruach Chadashah*.

Notes

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1. 'Chaim Stern's Liturgical Swan Song', *CCAR Journal* (Fall 2003), 61.
2. 'Were Our Mouths Filled with Song': *Studies in Liberal Jewish Liturgy* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997).
3. Ibid., 90.
4. Ibid., 131.
5. Ibid., 221.
6. Written to be given by Eric Friedland at Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue on Shabbat Shuvah 2003. Unfortunately Eric was taken ill when changing planes in America and had to cancel his trip. Instead the sermon was read out by Rabbi Andrew Goldstein.