

The Funeral Tomorrow Morning

The following is a letter concerning the death of a Jewish boy (B. A., to use fictitious initials) from an overdose of heroin. We deem it an important contemporary American Jewish document.

October 19, 1970

Dear Rabbi:

I hate to be a bearer of bad news but I knew you'd want to know. This morning (Monday) at 5:30 A.M., B. A. passed away. He died at his home from an overdose of heroin. He just got out of jail this past Friday and I guess he started shooting-up as soon as he hit the street.

I'll not pass judgment on him. As you know, he and I were the best of friends for years and I am very shaken up over his tragic death.

His life was too short—only 22 years, and he didn't get a chance to learn anything about the world. The guy was always begging (in his own way) for love, but for some reason was never able to find any. His parents couldn't give him what he needed, nor could his brother. I'm not sure if I could have or not. I'll never know because I never gave him the chance. I was always so concerned about myself that I completely ignored him when he needed me most. Had I not been so selfish thinking he would hinder my plans, I might have shared some of the breaks I got, such as jobs, school, etc. I'm not blaming myself for his death, but I'm just wondering if things wouldn't have been different if I would have taken the time to understand him. It's too late now, I know, but I wish when we (he and I) first started smoking grass [marijuana] we would have stayed with grass. Or when he first started using heroin, I wish I would have been strong enough to reject him for it rather than going along with him like I did do.

Sure, during my four years of using drugs, I suffered. I suffered a lot! I spent much time in jail, the hospital, etc., I lost a fine wife, a

beautiful home, and all respect from my family and friends. These things I can have again if I work hard enough, but now I am suffering more than I ever did—or ever will! I lost the best friend I ever had because of drugs. His friendship, no matter how much trouble we both got into, was truly sincere. Before heroin, we would have done anything for each other. This friendship, no matter how hard I work or how long I look, can never be replaced. I knew him in ways no one else did, just as he knew me. I knew him so well. I could almost predict his every move. Now, Rabbi, B. A. is gone, and all of a sudden I feel kind of incomplete. I could always go to him when I was lonely and he would always be there. No more though. Now he won't be here physically, that's for sure, but I assure you that he will always be with me in spirit. He's gone and now I have to carry on for the both of us.

I have already started doing good. I've been working in the mail office at the university and I've been going to classes two nights a week also. I get two courses paid for by the university as a benefit from working there. Each Monday night from 6 P.M. to 8:45 P.M. I have my "Introduction to Philosophy" course which I enjoy a lot and every Thursday night from 7:30 P.M. to 10:15 P.M. I have my "Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime" course. So with working eight hours a day and studying every night I don't have too much time for anything else. This much time consumed surely helps to keep me away from and my mind off of drugs. I've been working very hard trying to make something of myself and now I'm even going to work harder for B. A. as well as myself. I know he wants to see me do good in this world and I *won't* let him down. We grew up as a team, so even though he's gone I still am carrying the ball for the two of us. When I succeed—we both will succeed! I *will* succeed too!!!

I doubt seriously after the tragic way B. A. died, if I could ever look at a needle again—least of all stick one in my arm. Never again, Rabbi. If I had any doubts before about going back to drugs, I damn sure have none now! It's unfortunate, but maybe this shock is what I needed to face reality.

Please pray for him, Rabbi, as I will every day. Whenever you hear his name mentioned or whenever you think of him let those

words and those thoughts be good. He paid dearly for his mistakes and now that he's gone I feel anytime he is thought of he should be thought of for the good things he's done—not the bad things. That's how he was thought of when he was alive. There was a lot of good in that kid—only you had to know him to see it.

He wasn't bad—he just never had the love and understanding necessary to give him any security. The most secure I've ever seen him was in [the hospital]. At least there were some people who really did love him—me, you, T., and a lot of other people who got to know him well.

Please let T. know about B. A. He often talked about how much he cared for her.

Thanks for letting me cry on your shoulder, Rabbi. I'll keep in touch with you and let you know what's what. The funeral is tomorrow morning so I'll close now and try to get some sleep.

Take care.

Respectfully yours,
[Signature]

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