

EULOGY FOR A LITTLE BIRD

TO A LITTLE GIRL WHO MOURNS FOR IT

Dear Laurie:

I just learned that your pet bird passed away. I can appreciate how badly you feel because of this. I know how attached you were to it.

I am not one of those who dismiss such things as trivial, because it is only a bird—or a dog or a cat or any other living thing. When you form a warm relationship with a living creature, it becomes a part of your life. So I can understand how much you miss the company of even a little bird which relied upon you and which made you so happy.

However, all of us have to learn this lesson in life. We are all mortal creatures. By this I mean that all that is created must sooner or later come to an end. This holds true not only for birds and animals and flowers, but for human beings as well. It is a sad thought, but it is a fact, and one which we have to learn to live with. After all, if life was endless, then living might not really be

worthwhile, because we would never do the things that were important—always postponing them for next year or next century. Because we know that life must end sometime, we try to cram into the span of life that God gives us all the love and the affection and the good deeds and the creativity that we possibly can. It is only because life eventually ends, that the living we do until then can be meaningful, happy, and valuable. For instance, if you knew that you would have your bird forever and ever, you might never take the time to develop warmth towards it, feed it, and derive any pleasure from its chirping and singing. It is only because we humans know that everything in life is limited, that we make an effort to fill the years we have with light and helpfulness and kindness and goodness. So look upon the death of this little bird not only as a blow, but also as something that was necessary and that allowed you to shower your love and affection upon it for the time you did have it. In a way, it is only because it died that you were able to love it so much before. The same holds true for parents and grandparents ^{and} relatives and friends.

So, if anything, this sad occasion should give you pause for thought—as it does for me while I am writing this letter—about how very much we have to do in the time that God has allotted us. We have so much to achieve, so much love to show, so many mitzvot to perform, so much happiness and pride to give our parents and grandparents!

A LETTER TO A YOUNG GIRL

When you look at it that way, you will see that the fact that life ends is not all bad, even if it certainly isn't all good. That is why we Jews recite a special blessing at the occasion of death or any kind of very bad news. We say *barukh Dayyan ha-Emet*—"blessed is the true Judge." God is a judge in the sense that He sometimes pronounces a harsh verdict and sentences one of His beloved creatures to death. But He is also "true"—and what He does, He does out of love and kindness as well. He knows that by taking away life, He gives us the opportunity to fill the time we do have with all the good things that make life worth living.

I know, Laurie, that losing the bird was a painful experience, but I hope that the explanation I gave you will help you in some way to accept the fact with less anguish. If the death of that little bird will help you achieve this kind of perspective, then that little bird will itself have made a real contribution to your life—and in that way, it will live on!

Cordially yours,

Rabbi Norman Lamm