

## A HESPED FOR DANIEL

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On January 18, 2000, Dr. Daniel Thursz passed away in Washington, D.C.—one week before his 71<sup>st</sup> birthday. He had undergone multiple bypass surgery and was thought to be recovering well. His unanticipated death left his family bereft of its central figure, his friends uncomprehending, and his colleagues dismayed.

Who was Daniel Thursz? That question conjures up manifold responses. He and his late brother were the children of strongly Zionist parents who moved to Casablanca, Morocco where his father started the Zionist movement. Dan was born there, and the family came to New York in 1941 on a neutral refugee shipplying a hostile Atlantic Ocean. He received academic degrees from Queens College and the Catholic University of America. While avoiding the terror of Europe, his own immediate family was unfortunately directly affected by America's own nightmare of the McCarthy era.

Family meant much to Dan Thursz and was clearly his first priority—albeit by his own, grudging admission it often didn't look that way in his allocation of time. Dan was blessed in boundless measures by the love, support, counsel, probing, and guidance from his devoted wife Hadassah. He enjoyed the love and admiration of his four children and spoke with pride of their accomplishments and those of three spouses who joined the family. Later on, truth be told, all of them were somewhat sidelined as eight grandchildren came into his life. At how many meetings did Dan show how many pictures of the grandchildren? His joy and involvement with them were self-evident.

Given Dan's francophile background, it is perhaps no accident that he was the personification of *l'homme engage*, the involved man. Dan Thursz was a man of multiple commitments who was uniquely able to do justice to them all. Foremost, he was a superb professional. He innovated in both the theory and practice of communal social work. He had a singular ability to care for and consider individual needs while working with groups and communities. When others sought euphemisms to identify their profession, he proudly called himself a social worker.

Dan was also a proud and dedicated Jew. His emphasis was less on religious observance than on an irrevocable commitment to the Jewish people and to Israel. In his efforts as executive vice president of B'nai B'rith, as a leader of the Peace Now movement, in multiple roles in relation to Israel and its institutions, as president and as a leader of the Jewish Communal Service Association (JCSA), a strong spirit of *ahavat Yisrael* was always evident. Moreover, it was always linked with efforts to improve, intensify, and deepen the interaction between the individual and the community. His striving was for a democratic community that enriched the spirit and lives of its members while it was strengthened by their growth.

Emanating from his Jewish and social work commitments, Dan Thursz was a fervent and articulate advocate of the disadvantaged and poor. His career included a term of public service as associate director of VISTA—the Volunteers in Service to America. It was an assignment he took very seriously because he was an early and continuing advocate of wider utilization of the skills of volunteers in many arenas.

Later in his professional career, Dan was increasingly involved in issues of aging and held leadership roles in several groups in this field. At the time of his death, he was president emeritus of the National Council on the Aging, president of the International Federation on Aging, and director of the Center on Global Aging of Catholic University.

In all aspects of his career, Dan Thursz was always the teacher—probing, challenging, questioning. He was a demanding educator and a strong advocate of conceptually based professional practice and documented assumptions. He served as dean of the University of Maryland's School of Social Work and Community Planning for 10 years and earlier taught social work at Maryland and at Catholic University. He was also the initiator and director of the BBYO Summer Camp Institute and Israel summer programs. In all of these settings, he was a dedicated practitioner of Socratic dialogue, always pushing forward—at times beyond what some others deemed reasonable bounds.

For those of us he left behind, it remains to give thanks that Dan lived among us and to honor him both by working a little harder and a little longer on the tasks that remain uncompleted. *Zecher Zaddik Livracha.*



*Daniel Thursz.*