

CONDOLENCE MOTION

Moved by: Councillor James Pasternak

Seconded by: Councillor Mike Colle

The Mayor and Members of Toronto City Council are deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Rabbi Yitzchok Kerzner on Friday, November 27, 2020.

Rabbi Yitzchok Kerzner who was born in Vienna in 1927, and fled Nazi-occupied Vienna, traveling to the United States on the last ship to leave occupied Europe before the war. As a young child, Rabbi Kerzner attended the Yeshiva Toras Chaim in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, New York, and went on to study at the Advanced Research Institute in Monsey, New York before obtaining a political science degree from Brooklyn College. After graduating, Rabbi Kerzner began teaching at Yeshiva of Brighton, where he would meet Rebbitzin Bash Kerzner, who would become his wife for over 50 years. Rabbi Kerzner's first rosh position was at the shul in New London, Connecticut, where he also founded the Hebrew day school of North East Connecticut. By 1957, Rabbi Kerzner and his wife had two children, and the family of four moved to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, where Rabbi Kerzner became rosh of Congregation Ohav Zedek, leading the effort to improve the local day school and raise the considerable funds needed for the development of a new building. Rabbi Kerzner became Dean of the Israel Ben Zion Academy and later, identifying that both Scranton and Wilkes-Barre had excellent day schools but no yeshiva, co-founded the Yeshiva Bais Moshe in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Rabbi Kerzner was instrumental in this effort, not only for his vision of a Yeshiva for the Jewish community, but also Rabbi Kerzner's ability to engage in meaningful dialogue to win over the hearts and minds of local Pennsylvanians.

In 1972, Rabbi Kerzner moved to Toronto with his family of seven, joining Clanton Park Synagogue where he served as spiritual leader of the shul for 30 years until his retirement in 2002. During Rabbi Kerzner's tenure at Clanton Park Synagogue, he played an instrumental role leading tremendous growth in advanced Torah studies and Jewish education, transforming the congregation into one of Toronto's most active and prominent Orthodox shuls. On the event of Rabbi Kerzner's retirement, Clanton Park Synagogue president Bob Silberstein noted that "Rabbi Kerzner has managed to build bridges with diverse elements of the community both within and without," and "this legacy of unity is one we will strive to continue and emulate into the future."

Rabbi Kerzner is remembered as being a great role model, a brilliant orator, and an incredibly caring, compassionate, and warm human being. He left a remarkable legacy and made Toronto the stronger place that it is today. The Jewish community is always challenged by the course of history and yet Rabbi Kerzner helped guide many through what often felt like unsettled times. He not only gave guidance to the community but contributed immensely to Toronto as a City of empathy, compassion and love.

The City Clerk is requested to convey, on behalf of the Members of Toronto City Council, our sincere sympathy to Rabbi Kerzner's family and friends.

February 3, 2021