

Says who?

written by Ozer Bergman

July 13, 2010

In memory of Y" M ben A" Y

A good friend of mine was *niftar* (died) last week. It was sort of sudden and unexpected, even though he was 65 years old (he didn't look it) and even though he had cancer.

Well, besides that I miss him and will miss him—we were *chavrusas* (study partners) for a long time and on weekday mornings we often had a post-*davening* (prayer) shmooze—I'm a little annoyed. Why? Well, not because I'm going to miss him. That's not his fault. But what's bothered me is I think he could've tried harder to stay alive.

The Shabbos after he was *niftar*, I'm on my way to shul and I pass a Satmar friend. He stops me and asks, "What happened to your buddy?" I shrug and answer, "He had cancer." Pretty self-explanatory, right? Says it all. So the Satmar guy looks up at me—he's about 5'6" and I'm 6'5"—and in typical Jewish fashion shoots back:

"If someone has cancer, he has to die?!"

And that caught my feeling. Rebbe Nachman teaches again and again: Don't give up! Never despair! A diagnosis is not a death sentence. It's certainly a challenge. I can't imagine what it's like to hear a doctor telling me such a diagnosis or how I would react. I saw my dear buddy move more slowly, heard him tell of how weak he felt, and how cold. I don't judge him, but still I think, "If only he had tried."

So I learned a bit more about how and when to apply Rebbe Nachman's teaching, that the Rebbe tells us we must be brave even in the face of death. "Even if a sword lies on your neck, don't hold back from [praying for] mercy" (*Berakhot* 10a).

Easier said than done. But that's a challenge we may face.

It takes courage to live.