

ואולך אתכם קוממיות
With a Head Held High
By Rabbi Daniel Fridman

In Tribute to Dov Nahari (1937-2018)
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The Torah reading in this week's double *parashah*, Behar Bechukotai, famously contains the ברכות וקללות, the blessings and curses which the Jewish people will face in their history. The Torah first presents the blessings, those which the Jewish people will merit for following in the ways of the Torah, and then the curses, should, Heaven forbid, the Jewish people stray from the Torah.

Our Dov, in his lifetime, knew the meaning of experiencing both blessings and curses, but in precisely the opposite order. Dov entered the world in what was one of our people's, and all of humanity's, darkest hours, in 1937. He was a child survivor of curses that transcend anything which could be written or expressed in words.

And yet, as the Ibn Ezra, the great 12th century Spanish sage points out regarding the blessings and curses in this week's Torah portion, even though, superficially, it may seem that there are more curses, the blessings actually far outnumber the curses. And so it was with Dov. He merited not only survival, but active participation in the building of his most beloved State of Israel, of fighting in her wars, as the flagged draped over his Aron represents.

The Torah portion begins, וידבר ה' אל משה בהר סיני לאמר. God spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai. Dov was privileged to fight in מלחמת סיני, Israel's victorious war to retake the Sinai desert. He was a hero of the Jewish people. Though Israel was, as was the case in all of her wars, dramatically outnumbered by Egyptian forces representing a nation many times Israel's size, דב lived the blessing written into this week's portion, ורדפו מכם חמישה מאה ומאה מכם רבבה ירדפו ונפלו אויביכם לפניכם לחרב.

And yet, even these great blessings of victory could only pale in comparison to the greatest blessing of Dov's life, his wife of fifty seven years, his beloved Sara. This week's Chapter of Pirkei Avot speaks of the ultimate bond of love, אהבה שאינה תלויה בדבר, a love which depends on nothing else, which knows for no ulterior motive, which is justified in its very existence. Together, Dov and Sarah built their family.

Yet, as our Sages remind us, ושונתם לבניך- אלו תלמידיך, you shall teach your children, these are your students, Dov had more than biological children. He was responsible for the Jewish education of thousands, literally thousands, of Jewish children in Teaneck and in the broader Bergen County community. And in this enterprise, his partner, whom he loved so deeply, was Rabbi David Feldman, of blessed memory.

Shortly after Rabbi Feldman came to The Center in 1982, Dov received a call from Rabbi Feldman, supposedly responding to an inquiry that Dov had made concerning the Hebrew school at The Jewish Center. When Dov responded that he had not, in fact, inquired concerning a position at the Center, Rabbi Feldman responded, with his characteristic charm, 'I see- but let us pretend that you did.' And so, a match was made, and thousands of Jewish children were connected to Judaism, to The Torah, to Jewish history, to the State of Israel, as a result.

When Dov retired from The Center, he continued to live his life with energy and with verve. On his bike, in health, and then, in illness, still on his bike. When I first met Dov, he was already suffering from very serious illnesses, and yet, there he was, telling me about the challenges of synthesizing one's dialysis schedule with one's biking schedule. I was reminded of the statement our Sages recorded in this week's chapter of Pirkei Avot, בן שמונים לגבורה, at eighty years old, the inner strength, the inner resolve, the resilience, with which he persevered.

Dov's incredible tenacity never faded, even as the scourge of illness grew increasingly serious. ובחרת בחיים, until his final moments, he continued to choose life. It would never have been possible without Sarah, without Yoram, without Michal, without the love and the strength he drew from his family.

And so, the journey does, on this sad day, come to an end. But, let us never forget Dov, the educator par excellence, and his final lesson. In the final words of the ברכות of this week's *parashah*, the Torah tells us, ואשבר מוטות עלכם ואולך אתכם קוממיות, 'I will break the bonds of your yoke, and I will lead you upright.' As Rashi comments, בקומה זקופה, upright, with dignity, and with pride. The child survivor of the war, who saw his people so bowed and so humbled, who went on to fight for a proud nation, lived until his final moment with dignity, with a קומה זקופה, with his head held high.