

## **דברי חכמים בנחת נשמעים**

*The Words of the Wise are Heard Gently<sup>1</sup>*

Rabbi Daniel Fridman

*In Tribute to Rabbi David M. Feldman on the Occasion of his Fourth Yahrzeit*

In formulating the nature of the eight days of Chanukah, the Sages of the Talmud used a very telling expression, ‘they were established as days of praise and thanksgiving’,<sup>2</sup> **קבעום ועשאום ימים טובים בהלל<sup>2</sup>**, **והודאה**.

And so, it is altogether fitting that on these days of praise and thanksgiving, we offer these same sentiments to Rabbi David M. Feldman, zt’l, whose fourth yahrzeit was marked on the sixth of Kislev, and who faithfully led our congregation for over two decades, with erudition, compassion, and grace.

In the halakhic system, there is a basic equivalency which maintains regarding a husband and wife, **אשתו כגופו דמי**, a concept that has particular relevance on the days of Chanukah with respect to fulfilling the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah candles. Personally, I have never seen a greater expression of this concept, in terms of a shared sense of mission, of partnership, in life, and even beyond, than in the Aviva and Rabbi Feldman. And so, as we honor Rabbi Feldman, it is axiomatic that we honor Aviva, who should continue to live and be well.

We have chosen to honor Rabbi Feldman, at Aviva’s wise suggestion, through the lens of speech, of the power of words to touch and to transform.

The capacity for language is itself reflective of our basic humanity, as Onkelos rendered **ויהי האדם** **רוח ממללא** to be **לנפש חיה**, the spirit of speech.

Words are at the same time the basis for our relationship with our Creator, in the words of Hosea, **קחו**, **עמכם דברים ושובו אל ה’**, and are themselves a gift from the Almighty, as we recite in the service of the days of Awe, **לאדם מערכי לב ומה’ מענה לשון**.

Words can destroy worlds and create them,<sup>3</sup> **בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם<sup>3</sup>**.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Rabbi Fridman’s remarks this past Tuesday evening at the tribute entitled “Words Matter”.

<sup>2</sup> Talmud Shabbat 21b.

<sup>3</sup> Mishnah Avot 5:1.

Words, our Sages taught us in their equating embarrassment to bloodshed, can literally be instruments of the greatest cruelty, or, when used appropriately, the most basic tools of decency and kindness, to heal and to encourage those whose spirits are crushed, in the words of Isaiah, להחיות רוח שפלים ולהחיות לב נדכאים.

And always, it is not merely the words which are selected and which are spoken, but the manner in which they are delivered, the tone, as the wisest of all men reminded us- and to be sure, in this era of cable news, and the post, and the tweet, we need the reminder- the words of the wise are heard with gentleness, דברי חכמים בנחת נשמעים.

And so, on these days of להודות ולהלל, we express our gratitude and our praise, for one such חכם, whose eloquence and attentiveness to the power of speech was itself a window to his soul, which illuminated, like the Chanukah candles itself, our entire community. We remember his carefully chosen words, and his gentle manner, and we know that these words, which were an expression of his own humanity, affirmed that self same virtue in those to whom he addressed himself.

In considering how we might best honor Rabbi Feldman's leadership here at the Jewish Center of Teaneck, we have decided to name the Discretionary Fund, our primary vehicle for *chesed*, through which we are able to distribute much needed funds to needy individuals in the community, as well as deserving organizations, both locally and in the State of Israel, the Rabbi David M. Feldman Memorial Fund.

If words matter, and they do, than surely names matter as well, and it is only fitting that Rabbi Feldman's name should perpetually be associated with kindness done in this community, for he was kindness embodied and personified.

May his *neschama* have an aliyah, and be a source of blessing to his beloved Aviva, to his children, and grandchildren, and to our entire congregation.