

David Surrey  
*David ben Shmuela v'Zalman ha Levi*  
February 11, 1977 – October 20, 2010

Too soon. Too soon. This death, at THIS time is not what we expected. The shock. The numbness. The pain, searing and throbbing is ... unbearable. I, so accustomed to finding the right words feel absolutely bereft of speech. To whom can we turn for support, for guidance, for comfort?

Look around you. Our Jewish tradition, over and over again, talks about the *minyan*, the minimum quorum of ten needed for prayer. Our Jewish tradition talks about the community and its power to heal, to save. So, first, we can turn to each other for support, for guidance, for comfort.

I am a rabbi. My authority to lead comes from my study of Torah. So, we can also turn to the eternal words of the Torah for support, for guidance, and for comfort. And ultimately, if we are open and willing, we have the Divine Author of the Torah, our Heavenly Parent, that same Parent who I believe, with every fiber of my being, is with David even as I speak, we have God, for support, for guidance and for comfort.

In turning to the Torah, we find a story from this week's portion, called *Vayera*, from the Book of Genesis, which perfectly puts David's life into perspective. Abraham has just learned that, at the remarkable age of 100, he is going to be a father. His destiny is about to be fulfilled. His name, Av-raham, in Hebrew, means a father of a multitude, and he is finally on his way. Then he learns of the judgment that Sodom and Gomorrah are about to be destroyed. Any normal person would have moved on, why rock the boat? Why risk everything he has? But not Abraham. Always thinking of others, he takes God on. Abraham asks: "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty?" And there begins a Middle East-style bartering session between God and Abraham: If there are 50 innocent people God will spare the cities, 45, 40, 30 ... all the way down to ten, the *minyan*, the quorum, the basic number needed to begin to create a community. We are left with you and with me. The community, the people we must turn to in order to get through this tragedy of our time.

And in this biblical story of selflessness, our David, whose life we come to celebrate this morning, was Abraham. Almost until the end, but not at the end, he was always thinking of others, always, always putting their needs before his own. Never playing it safe. Like Abraham, our Patriarch, the first Jew, our David was absolutely fearless. So let's tell his story, because it is not right that death, should overshadow thirty-three years of life.

We start with his name. David. King of Israel, the one who took on the giant Goliath, fearless, and won! David, the sweet singer of God, who knew how to love. The name itself is Hebrew. It means beloved. Bonnie and Saul Surrey could not have chosen a better name for their second child, born in Philadelphia, home of our beloved Phillies, on February 11, 1977.

Their first child, Daren, was born four and a half years earlier, in 1972. She told me that David was such a cute little boy – he was her little doll. She was there when he took his first steps. They fought, they played, and in time, this little doll would pick up a baseball bat and threaten to take on any boy who he thought was picking on his big sister. Fearless. And yet this fearless wonder allowed his sister to pin him in order to give him haircuts. Together, as young adults, Daren and David confronted

addiction, and together they were triumphant. Their addictions were different, but that same well-spring of strength, perhaps learned in the loving, supportive, nurturing home of their parents, saw them both through. David just celebrated ten years with Gamblers Anonymous, GA. And in that time, he has led meetings, met with addicts, coached others, always giving, like our Father Abraham, always thinking of others.

David and Dureen spent a lot of their twenties together – hanging out, going to clubs. And it is her baby brother, David, to whom Dureen gives credit for reconnecting her with her future husband, Jim, her rock, without whom she would be able to get through this current crisis. And it is with Jim that Dureen was able to create such a loving family, with Jordyn, 4, and Zach, 18 months. Watching Uncle David down on the floor with his niece and nephew, it was clear to all the David would have been an amazing father. It is this realization that pains David's wife, Valerie, more than anything else. It is what pains us all – a life not fully realized, potential not fulfilled.

One of things that Daureen, that David's parents Bonnie and Saul, all pointed to was David's amazing ability to internalize pain. When he got his head stuck in a toy truck as a baby, his big sister Daureen's doing, David never complained, even as the doctors and nurses had to pry him free. When infant David got his hand stuck in a drawer, no crying. He just waited patiently and quietly until his mother discovered the problem and dislodged him. At age 13, right after his bar mitzvah at Shir Shmayim synagogue, David was in a horrific automobile accident while on the grounds of Baldi Middle School, where he should have been safe.

Before the accident, where the driver hit poor David with such impact that he was thrown in the air only to be run over again the by the same driver – before the accident, David was an avid athlete. The boy who knew no fear played football, basketball, even played soccer once with a broken wrist, not telling anyone. But what this accident did to this athlete, a young boy now with 13 broken bones, in a full body cast, growth plates shattered, with legs which were 2 ½ inches different in height, I cannot begin to tell you. And so David, who as an infant had instinctively learned to internalize pain, now became adept at internalizing pain. When David turned 19, a revolutionary treatment was made available to him called Limb Lengthening, which would give David normalcy once again. But the year-long process was very painful, involving the breaking and resetting of bones, and so much more. I will not go into all the details, but his mother and father were instrumental in the day-to-day process. Throughout it all, David became a master of internalizing pain, in part, not to cause his parents pain. I do not mean to dwell on this part of David's life, but I share it with you to drive home the fact that throughout David's life, he has had to deal with more pain than any of us, even in this profound moment of emotional pain, has ever had to or, please God, will ever have to cope. And in understanding David's talent to internalize pain, we also get some understanding that David's ability to internalize pain was both a blessing .... and a curse. If those closest to him did not sense the fullness of David's pain, they cannot possibly hold themselves accountable. And David, in his own way, teaches us, that if we are in pain, we MUST not be as brave and silent as he was. David teaches us that in our love for life, we must ask for help, from our friends, our loved ones, our clergy, our health care providers. This is what it means to have a minyan. This is what it means to be, truly to be in community – that sacred ten that Abraham was looking for to save a city, just a minimum ten good souls who are willing to be there for each other – something which Sodom and Gomorrah could not provide, but which I believe YOU can.

David met Valerie when he was 21, back in 1998. She was working at a club, and David kept coming back to her, engaging her in conversation. She found him very attractive: beautiful brown eyes, black hair, tall, by this time both legs matching height, good looking. But more than that, David was as

good looking inside as he was outside. She took his number. They arranged a first date. But true to the traditions of his people, David was late – we call it JST -- Jewish Standard Time. She had almost given up on him and was going to go out with her girlfriends instead, but he showed. He salvaged the date by bringing her to his parents' home and they watched movies together. From that point until this, Valerie has always found shelter, love and protection with David's parents, Bonnie and Saul.

Well one date led to two, before you knew it, they spent every day that summer together. Valerie dreaded continuing her education at Penn State up in State College. She rightly feared that the six hour round trip drive from the Philadelphia suburbs would put an end to their blossoming relationship. How wrong she was. On the first day at Penn State, as Valerie was moving into her apartment, she heard a knock on her door. She opened it. There was David with flowers to wish her well in this new stage of her life. There would often be flowers for Valerie from David. Valerie's mom, Florence, said it all, when she told me that David was simply a Gentleman. A Gentleman – and so much more. This David, who was so good on the floor with his baby niece and nephew, was even more attentive to the elderly. For Florence's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, no one was more attentive to her elderly Aunt Mary than David.

And Bonnie told me that he positively worshipped his own grandparents, Zom and Syliva, and Saul's mom, Grandma Jane. He treated them all like gold. He revered them. In fact it is no coincidence that we are traveling from here to far-flung King David Memorial Park in Bensalem at the end of this service. The beautiful body that housed David's eternal soul these past 33 years will be laid to rest next to his beloved grandparents, giving comfort to all that visit, knowing that now David is eternally reunited with the grandparents he loved and revered so much in life. This one fact will, hopefully, give us a modicum of comfort.

David was a man of ambition and drive. He tried classes at State College. With an undiagnosed reading disorder and undiagnosed ADD, David still managed to pass all his classes. Then he attended and graduated from CIT – the Computer Institute of Technology. Then he set himself to hard labors working for Hadfield's Sea Food, managing – along with his wife, Valerie, to purchase the business in July 2008 – again, like other things in his life, a blessing and a curse. David was so good with people. Even in childhood, he was able to sell more candy than anyone else because he could get other children to sell the candy for him because like his name in Hebrew, David was beloved. But being a natural salesman, being loveable, and actually running a business, especially in this horrible economy, is something very different. A man with a harder heart than David's would have possibly done better, but a man who is constantly thinking of others, and putting their needs before his own, is not necessarily compatible with running a business.

I want to return to David's loving, generous heart. It was while driving that van for Hadfield's Sea Food that David realized the full extent of that loving heart. It was November 2004. Arriving in a horse drawn carriage right out of a fairy tale, David called Valerie on her cel phone and asked her to come outside her place of work. She did, looking up and down the street for the Hadfield's van. No van. Just a horse drawn carriage up the street. Funny, she thought. Those carriages are down at 5<sup>th</sup> street, maybe 6<sup>th</sup> street ... never 18<sup>th</sup> and Spruce Streets. But there it was. And there was this guy waving at her standing atop the carriage. Wait. That guy was no ordinary guy. It was her David. And during that ride, armed with champagne, David popped the question. It would be another full year before they got married as Valerie insisted that her mother take care of a tumor first. Bonnie was inclined to wait until after the wedding – what was two or three more weeks more? Valerie said she and David could never live with themselves if that delay might have ended her life. And how right they were. Had Bonnie

waited she most likely would not be with us today. And Bonnie is my very best student in my weekly Torah class, as well as a beloved student of our Cantor, and our synagogue library has no chance of coming back into order again without Bonnie's steady hand and patience. So thank you Valerie on behalf of a grateful synagogue – although I am sure my gratitude is shared with many people in this room.

David was the most caring of husbands. Together, Valerie and David took care of the stray cats of their neighborhood, adopting many, finding homes for some, keeping the rest. They were always in love with all God's creatures, great and small. As a husband, David has been attentive and caring. Always driving her to the train station, knowing that if she drove herself alone, Valerie would be stressed out. Even on that that fateful day, on October 20<sup>th</sup>, when Valerie called David to let her know that her train was delayed, David offered to come with the car and pick her up and drive her to work. Up until the very end, but excluding the very end, David was nothing but loving and caring for Valerie, and for his entire family.

It is quite possible that you might allow David's death to overshadow his life. But I would assert to you most passionately, that I think this would be a terrible injustice, almost as unjust as David's death. David spent 33 years living, and those 33 years should not and cannot be forgotten in the single moment of a death. It is up to Valerie, her mom and dad, it is up to Bonnie, Saul, it is up to Dureen and Jim, and in time their children, Jordyn and Zach, it is up to you, friends and family, to preserve all that was good in David's life, and to teach the lessons of David's life to others. We need to learn to be more caring of others, more thoughtful, more attentive to both the elderly and the young, we also need to learn to share our pain, not hide it, and to ask for help when we need it, instead of playing the brave, macho, fearless ones. We need to learn not some, but ALL of the lessons David has come to teach us.

We are left with the story of brave Abraham who put the needs of the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah above his own needs. And finally, we are left simply with the name David, Hebrew for beloved. May we all work to love and to be loved, may we do this in David's name, and then *zichrona l'vracha*, his memory will be for a blessing, and we can say *amen*.