

Dear Chavraya,

The tension between the universal and the particular, and the effort to keep it a finely tuned tension, is one of the most important dynamics in my life. There are times, especially in relation to Israel, when that tension is challenged and there is need for quick retuning in order to maintain a harmonious pitch. During the past week I experienced a moment of disharmony with fellow peace activists while standing on Centre Street. Only by going out into the world as Jews and engaging others on the thoroughfares of life will equilibrium be challenged. Embracing the vertigo that comes with living in multiple worlds and learning to fine-tune its tension, we are given the opportunity to create ever more beautiful harmonies.

In a week of heightened tension in relation to Iran, a discussion began among several people at the end of our weekly interfaith peace vigil. I had been holding a sign that read, "No War on Iran." A passing acquaintance stopped and excitedly shared his concern that Israel might attack Iran. Another voice immediately expressed the fear that Israel would push the United States to attack Iran. My head was suddenly spinning. Memories of the Cold War's nuclear arms race had been gnawing at me with a sick familiarity. I am terrified at the prospect of either an American or an Israeli attack on Iran, as I am by Iran's missile tests. The insinuation, amplified in the next few minutes, that Israel determines American foreign policy crossed a line. A discussion ensued on the nature of peacemaking and what it means to be a peacemaker. We agreed quickly, of course, on the embrace of nonviolent conflict resolution, on the futility of war, recognition of a common human bond. But then some harder details, a commitment to fairness, avoiding facile explanations and arguments, taking care not to demonize, recognizing and responding to the real fears of all parties, whether Iranians or Israelis.

Coming home, I sat down to read this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Balak*. Balak is the Moabite king who hires the prophet Bilam to curse Israel. Try as he might to curse Israel, Bilam finds only words of blessing. Looking out upon Israel camped in the desert, Bilam speaks of Israel as *a people that will dwell alone/am l'vadad yishkon*. I found unexpected resonance and challenge in the *parasha*. Just a short while before I had felt alone as a Jew, even among friends with whom I share so much. There are times when we do dwell alone, when it seems that only other Jews, and perhaps other minorities, can understand that vertigo we know so well. It is easy to retreat further into our selves at those times and to dwell alone. In today's world there is no desert big enough in which to remain only among one's own. If we pretend that we can dwell alone, then by our absence from the struggle, we shall help to make of the entire world a wasteland. When the time does come to gather in the fruits of peace, only with the fine-tuned presence of every people and their song shall the human symphony be complete. Gathering now at our own tables, may we raise our voices proudly, for "the whole world is waiting to sing a song of Shabbos peace."

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor

