

Dear Chavraya,

I spent part of yesterday at a mini-retreat with about a dozen other rabbis. Though of short duration, it was uniquely restorative, and strikingly different from most rabbinic gatherings in the absence of words. It was a silent retreat. There were words of Torah at two different points, the holy words then embraced and carried in silence. There was sitting meditation prior to learning. Following the learning there was walking meditation. Lunch was in the context of eating meditation, quietly present with each other, looking out into the woods that surrounded, conscious of every morsel.

I was moved most by the walking meditation, in tears at times for the quiet and the slow. I was at first accompanied by memories. The retreat was held at Camp Grossman in Westwood. I had been a counselor there at a few different times, all long ago. I was a counselor for the first time the summer I turned sixteen, meeting my first girlfriend then. At others times through college I was there, and I remembered villages of twigs and pine needles I had made with kids, grading village roads with tree bark, and putting small boats of forest wood upon the stream. Walking quietly and deliberately, I noticed the surroundings more clearly than if walking at what comes to be the common pace. I walked along a path whose blazes were at once the thoughts of inner landscape, soulscape, and the sunshine upon my face, rocks and trees and sky surrounding.

To notice the beauty of the place we are in, or the glimmering of meaning even if in struggle, without a word at all to be said, is a prayer of gratitude to the One Whose name is The Place/*Hamakom*. To know that we each have a place, a place in which to be noticed and affirmed, and from which with confidence to notice others and to honor them as they pass by is a quiet teaching of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat B'midbar*. In the desert now upon the journey, at each place of encampment every tribe is to be arranged on all sides and equidistant from the *mishkan/sanctuary* in the center; and for every tribe, its insignia upon a flag to fly above. The language is not about the tribe, however, but about each person, that no one be swallowed up, the uniqueness of their place unrecognized among the multitude; *Ish al diglo/ every person shall camp next to their standard*.

The Izbitza Rebbe tells a parable: *If one plants an orchard in beautiful arrangement, and then removes or exchanges one familiar planting, the orchard will no longer be in a state of wholeness*. If we don't notice the plantings, it is as though they are not there. Taking note of the place around us, we help restore the wholeness that God intended, and we come to see ourselves more clearly too, finding greater wholeness within. Of what I saw upon the trail, I stopped and wrote these Revelations of a Walking Meditation:

The crunch of acorns underfoot
Darting bugs of phosphorescent green
Fallen leaves and newly formed
Sunlight warming, humus dark
Song of birds and of breeze
Love song, God's song in all.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor