

Dear Chavraya,

I recently attended a meeting at the new mosque in Roxbury. The stars were appearing in the sky as darkness settled softly. Just before the meeting began, Aziz excused himself, saying that he had not yet prayed *Ma'arib*. It was one of those moments of immediate recognition, so palpable the bond that joins us as children of Avraham/Ibrahim. I thought of a poignant reflection by Heschel, recalling an evening in Berlin when in the heaviness of his soul he had forgotten to pray, "Suddenly I noticed the sun had gone down, evening had arrived.... I had forgotten God..., I had forgotten that sunset is my business.... So I began to utter the words of the evening prayer." For Aziz, it was time for *Ma'arib*, and for me, it was time for *Ma'ariv*.

The meeting at the mosque was to work on details for a program that took place during the past week. It was the second of what I hope will be a bi-annual event that brings imams and rabbis together through a program called "Building Bridges through Learning." As I described regarding the first gathering last spring, the primary focus for learning is in small group partnerships, each a *chevruta*, from *chaver/friend*, in which imams and rabbis explore texts from each tradition. The topic of study for this week's gathering was prayer. The primary request made through evaluations of the first gathering was to do away with frontal presentation to allow participants more time for direct encounter with each other. So the learning began immediately, as people took bagels and coffee to tables spread around the room. For the first half-hour no texts were distributed, to facilitate personal sharing from the texts of each other's lives.

In a series of Torah portions now unfolding in the cycle of our reading, we find the sources from which the rabbis deduced the three times of daily prayer, *Shachris*, *Mincha*, and *Ma'ariv*, moments of pause in the morning, afternoon, and evening. The morning prayers are ascribed to Avraham, the afternoon prayers to Yitzchak, and the evening prayers to Ya'akov. In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Chayei Sarah*, we find the source for *Mincha*, *Vayetze Yitzchak lasu'ach basadeh/And Yitzchak went out to meditate in the field*. How fitting then that as our morning of learning turned to afternoon, imams and rabbis got up together to pray. It was a powerful moment when in Arabic the quavering chant of the Muslim call to prayer echoed throughout the synagogue where we were meeting. First the Muslims prayed and then the Jews, the presence of each as "Amen" to the prayer of the other.

At the beginning of *Chayei Sarah*, our mother Sarah dies. At the end of the *parasha*, Avraham dies. Yitzchak and Yishma'el, one the son of Sarah, one the son of Hagar, both the children of Avraham, estranged from each other for so long, now come together to bury their father. The Torah says that Avraham died *b'seyvah tovah/in a good old age*. The coming together of his sons is the good that Avraham found as he was gathered to his people.

Learning of each other's ways of prayer, and then trusting enough to offer prayer, imams and rabbis together, a blessing of good. So may it be upon us, as upon Avraham/Ibrahim, and upon Sarah and Hagar, and upon Yitzchak and Yishma'el; *Aleyhem hashalom/Peace be upon them*.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor