

Dear Chavraya,

During the past week I officiated at the funeral of a Holocaust survivor. Though I did not know the man who died, I felt a deep sense of personal loss. So it has been for some time, a sense of personal loss with every death of a survivor. As their numbers diminish, we lose with each one another witness to the horrors that destroyed one third of our people, another living inspiration and challenge to transcend hatred, racism, and fanaticism. With each one, I wonder what memories, what images, what psychic wounds will go now to the grave with them. In life, some were able to give haunted voice to the inexpressible, while others remained mute, their silence its own testimony.

During this week of *Parashat Massey/Journeys*, as Rudy's coffin was borne to the grave, his final journey in this world, I spoke of the song of triumph expressed both through his life and his death, a song finding its crescendo in his funeral. Rudy was not meant to die in old age, a father and grandfather surrounded by love, and then to be gathered to his people, to sleep with his ancestors in a Jewish cemetery. Surviving the death camps of Buchenwald and Auschwitz, but for the inexplicably miraculous his end would have been as that of so many others of his family and people, as smoke rising to Heaven, seeding the clouds with tears.

All of these are our journeys, journeys of the Jewish people, of those who survived and of those who didn't. *Eleh massey v'nei Yisrael/These are the journeys of the children of Israel*. *Parashat Massey* recounts the desert journey, enumerating each of forty-two camping places along the way. The Torah does not speak of one journey in the singular, but rather of journeys, *these are the journeys*. Every stage in the journey of our lives is its own journey, every place of our encampment, whether lush oasis or harsh desert, the starting point of the next journey. Through the geography of our people's journey, the Torah offers a map to guide our own living, reminding us that life is not one journey, but a series of journeys.

In a commentary on the meaning of Israel's journeys, the Ba'al Shem Tov, trunk in the tree of Chassidism, offers a beautiful teaching: *There were forty-two journeys and they correspond to [the journeys of] each person, from the day of one's birth until one's return to her or his world. Understand this, from the day of birth and going forth from his or her mother's womb, it is in the aspect of the Exodus from Egypt, and afterwards one journeys from journey to journey until one comes to the land of the living above*. We do not know what the nature of our life's journeys will be, as our ancestors did not know when they would make camp or journey forth, each according to God's word. In the midst of life's uncertainties, one of the great challenges of living is to appreciate meaning and beauty in the world in spite of all that would undermine it.

As I came to know Rudy through the words of his family, I learned that upon reaching the age of seventy, which he never imagined would be, he came to say that every day was a gift. It reminded me of a dear friend in my congregation in Victoria, British Columbia, Jack Gardner (of blessed memory). Also a survivor, a person of indefatigable spirit, Jack made a point of saying every day a simple phrase from the morning prayers, *Boruch HaShem yom yom/Blessed is God every*

day. From those whose life's journeys include great tragedy and whose eyes are yet able to see beauty, filled with compassion for those whose spirits have been broken, may we learn the way of weaving together the varied journeys of our lives and to receive the gift of each day as a blessing.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor