

Dear Chavraya,

I walked out for a bit of air and saw the first daffodil fully open. As though from outside of myself, I heard myself say that word of pure wonder, of blessing unbidden, "wow!" With a satisfied smile, I turned to look around to see if there were more. Equally unbidden, I heard myself utter a sound of lament, a clicking of the tongue with a great sigh, "ohhh." All of the crocuses that had been so full of color just the day before were laid low down, crumpled and mute. I turned from side to side, taking in the lone daffodil in its rising and the crocuses in their demise. Why did it have to be, in greeting the daffodil to say goodbye to the crocuses? For a moment, I tried to hold them both, standing between "wow" and "ohhh," trying to feel wonder for the cycle of life as it is for all creatures, for people and for flowers.

I have felt quiet today in marking my mom's twentieth yahrzeit. Of life so ephemeral, fleeting, and rich, it feels like a long time, and yet so short. Even in life, communication between us never depended on physical presence or proximity, and so it continues to be. Across the continent when I lived far away in British Columbia, we knew what each other would say without need for a phone call or letter, though both were nice and visits even better. She never used a computer and email was just beginning then anyway. Standing there between daffodil and crocus, I felt a tear on my cheek and her spirit hand upon my shoulder. More than anyone else, she taught me that death is part of life. Her warm smile touched us all, me and the flowers, softening the ground to give and receive, for life's rising and returning, each in its time. "Don't you understand," she said with a comforting laugh, "it's okay; the crocuses were beautiful, and now the daffodils, and the tulips, and then the Lilly of the Valley." And then she was gone, having said what she needed to say, what I needed to hear. I thought of words I had written when she died:

*Your way in the world was ever so gentle, mom.*

*Your life was a breath of God that caressed the flowers you loved.*

*And the flowers sang back to you, their friend who knew them all by name.*

*Lily of the Valley, my favorite and yours, we often lamented with each other the shortness of their season*

*As we smiled upon their beauty and breathed their fragrance, thankful for their time among us.*

To find our own quiet place to pause and reflect, whether a garden of flowers or of mind, is the unspoken lesson of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Sh'mini*. In this portion comes the very middle of the Torah. In the loving counting of scribes long ago, the middle comes with two words, *darosh* | | *darash*. It means to earnestly seek, to search out with care. Two words can't together mark the

middle of the Torah. The rabbis point out, therefore, that the first of the two words marks the end of the first half of the Torah, while the second of the two words marks the beginning of the second half of the Torah, each word meaning to search, to seek. The exact middle of the Torah is in the silent space between these words of seeking. In the very heart of the Torah is silence.

In our own quiet place of reverie, may we each behold the crocuses and the daffodils, anticipating the lilies of the valley, each in their own time. May we hear the voices of those we have loved, and in our own voice the sound of wonder in its saying of “wow” and of “ohhh.”

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor