

Dear Chavraya,

There will come a moment during the service this Shabbos morning when the absence of a name spoken among us for so long will tell of the absence of its bearer from this world. For more than a year, during the *Mi'she'berach* prayers for healing I have spoken the name of my dear friend, Rev. Terry Burke. Terry died this week after struggling with cancer for about a year and a half. In the silence of that prayerful moment, I shall feel Terry's presence, the warmth of his hug, the brightness of his smile, the integrity of his way in the world; a way of humility, simplicity, love, compassion, and good humor; hand in hand with God and people, a tireless seeker of justice and peace. May his memory be the blessing of his life.

My first rabbinic role in JP was at Terry's church, First Church, the Unitarian church by the monument. Mieke and I were not yet living in Jamaica Plain, Nehar Shalom still in its gestational stage, but Terry had heard of our plans through a mutual friend. He called me to introduce himself and asked if I would come speak to an adult education class he was teaching. And so our friendship began. From that time onward we would often meet for lunch at Purple Cactus and talk deeply over bowls of vegetarian chili, sharing of our lives, our work, and our personal projects. We went to demonstrations together, seeking justice for immigrants, for workers, calling for an end to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. After one demonstration, as we walked away a man approached us and asked for money. Terry and I both reached into our pockets. Terry handed the man some money. I had neither change nor small bills. As I apologized to the man for not being able to help him, he looked at my kippah and said sarcastically, "oh, you're Jewish." Feeling stung, I could feel Terry's arm around me, holding me up, comforting. For a time, as his schedule allowed, Terry would join us on Thursday mornings at JP Licks to learn Torah, so humble in his presence, able just to be, to listen, to ask, never revealing his own depth of knowledge and insight.

We dedicated our Thursday morning learning this week to Terry. There are two verses in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Shoftim*, that speak so deeply of Terry. At the outset of the portion are words that Terry took to heart and lived, *tzedek tzedek tirdof/justice, justice shall you pursue*. While he would only have acknowledged it as a challenge, others would see the second verse as the embodiment of Terry, a challenge fulfilled, *tamim ti'hi'yeh im hashem elokecha/be wholehearted with God, your God*.

After hearing of Terry's death, I sent an email to the loosely knit JP Interfaith Clergy Group to share the sad news. I was stunned as I stared at the first response, which came almost immediately. It was from Terry. In truth, it was an automated message from his still active email server. But in the way of a greater truth, it reflected Terry's abiding presence and his responsiveness to others. I thought of another teaching that the rabbis drew from *Parashat Shoftim*, *the wicked are as dead in life, the righteous are as living even in death*. I felt Terry's hug in that moment. He had a unique way of hugging, turning his head in such a way as to make room on his shoulder for the other's head, taking the other to himself, offering comfort.

Invited by Terry, I spoke many times over the years at his church, most often during the service on Sunday mornings. Just before Terry's illness was diagnosed, I had the honor of speaking at a service honoring Terry for his thirty years as pastor of First Church. The service was on a Friday night, which Terry apologized for, sensitive to what that meant for me. In the midst of our own Friday evening service, with others leading, Mieke and I got up and made our way to the church. As Terry had asked me to, I offered a talk on Torah and Nonviolence, a reflection of one of my own passionate concerns, something that I continue to work with, that over bowls of vegetarian chili Terry encouraged me to pursue and to make time for. I share here the closing paragraph of my talk on that Shabbos evening, seeing Terry very much in the way I had described Isaac, a digger of wells, a creator of new possibilities.

With humility and gratitude, I have offered these words in honor of my friend and our friend, Rev. Terry Burke. Terry, your way of being in the world speaks the truth of a tender heart. Your way of leadership through these thirty years of ministry in this beloved community is the way of a different kind of hero, that type of gentle leader that the world so needs. May you continue to dig wells of peace and bring people to drink of their waters together. In all the diversity of those who celebrate your leadership is a celebration of your love and embrace of each one for who they are. I look forward to many years of continuing friendship with you, of sharing the vision of a better world and together seeking the way to its fulfillment. Thank you.

Though there were not to be many years in this world for Terry, our friendship continues, his memory a blessing and an inspiration. In the quiet space of a Shabbos morning in which his name has been spoken for so long, so his presence shall continue to be.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor