

Dear Chavraya,

We think of you all from afar, getting ready for Shabbos in Jerusalem now. It is always dizzying to come here, and so it is now. It has been a week of intense emotion from the moment of arrival, our way from the airport delayed by traffic from the funerals of the three boys. The delay itself offered an opportunity to pause and feel the pain all around and within ourselves. We have talked with people across the political spectrum, feeling torn apart by the jagged differences. Today we were in the Negev, traveling with Rabbi Arik Ascherman, visiting El-Arkib, the remains of a Bedouin village destroyed over and over again. We sat with the village elder and two other men and a boy, conversing under a ragged tarp. They were fasting for Ramadan, no water or food in the intense heat, though not much of either is to be had in any case. Beyond the anger and pain, the elder spoke with hope of Jews and Bedouin working together again as once had been. I thought of this week's Torah portion and the Haftorah, my Bar Mitzvah portion. In *Parashat Balak*, the Midianite Prophet Bilaam looks out over Israel encamped in the desert and says, *mah tovu ohalecha Ya'akov, mish'k'notecha Yisra'el/how goodly are thy tents, O, Jacob, your dwelling places, O, Israel*. It is a dream and a vision, that if we will it, it shall be no dream, tents and dwelling places big enough to share. And in the Haftorah from the Prophet Micha, *higid l'cha adam, mah tov u'mah Hashem doresh mimcha/it has been told to you, O, mortal, what is good and what God seeks of you, only to do justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God*. Through the Torah portion and the Haftorah we are given the vision and the way. May we see the vision and walk the way to its fulfillment. Amidst the grief of this week, may a deeper sense of who we are rise up, bringing greater wholeness among ourselves, with each other and with others.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor