

Dear Chavraya,

As the week wends quickly toward Shabbos, I share but a few thoughts of the heart. Mieke and I are so grateful for the many expressions of sympathy and loving support that have flowed to us truly *k'nehar shalom/as a river of peace*, following the death of Mieke's mom in Belgium. On the long journey across the sea and on the first steps of the mourner's journey, we have felt the warmth of connection with you, our community. As we returned home in this week of *Parashat B'chukotai*, words of Torah give unique expression to what it means to be joined in such support and love.

The first words of *B'chukotai* seem unlikely as teaching about connection of people with each other, *Im b'chukotai taylechu/If you will walk in My statutes....* Some form of the word "walk," formed of the root *halach* appears many times in the *parsha*. Walking with each other, we walk with God. The rabbis offer a beautiful *midrash* that was meant, destined long ago, to be for us. In response to the opening words, *if you will walk in My statutes...*, the rabbis tell of kindness expressed among people, and then offer the words, *vay'hi k'nehar sh'lomecha/your peace shall flow like a river*. In the kindness that we have felt, our deepest hope for the meaning of *Nehar Shalom* is affirmed.

On this Shabbos, we finish reading the third book of the Torah, *Vayikra/Leviticus*, and as with the completion of each book of the Torah, we raise up the scroll and sing out, *chazak, chazak, v'nitchazek/be strong, be strong, and let us strengthen each other*. So may we all be strengthened in the kindness we show to each other and may that be our strength as a community.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor