

Dear Chavraya,

Something very special happened in shul last Shabbos morning. For me it was profoundly special, though I think all were touched by something that was completely intangible, and yet palpable and so present. It was a morning of remembrance, of honoring memories and telling of the blessings of those remembered. Jacquelynn entered shul for the first time as a mourner, the traditional words of comfort spoken by all, *Hamakom y'nachem otach...*, *May the One Who is Always With Us comfort you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem*. On her mother's *yohrzeit*, Robbie offered teaching and shared memories and chanted the Haftarah, all in honor of her mother. There was a deep sense of connection in the room, among those present and with those remembered, even if unknown to most but through the words of daughters for their mothers.

Feelings seemed to float among us, a web woven of words, of silence, and of tears. During the Torah reading, my father was called up for an aliyah by our *gabbai*, as he often is. Rising with the support of his cane, it took him a bit of time to make the journey from his seat to the reading table. There is always something that moves me in my dad's deep familiarity with the words of the blessings to be said over the Torah. Though having grown up in an observant home, he had never been particularly observant himself. Words remain and carry meaning beyond and deeper than what they actually mean. When my mother died I offered my dad a siddur at the time of Kaddish-saying. With a shrug of appreciation and regret, he said he didn't need it, he had said it enough times.

And so for the words of the Torah blessings, they come from a deep place, brought forth with a certain hoarseness of voice, my dad having had laryngeal cancer many years ago. Somewhere in the midst of the first blessing, I wish I had been aware of with just what word, my dad began to cry, not just the shedding of a few tears, but to sob. There was silence in the room, not a silence of nervousness or uncertainty, but of love and support. I put my arm around my dad, pulling his talis close around him. Perhaps feeling that I needed to offer some explanation, whether accurate or not, I explained that we had buried one of my dad's best friends that week. It was a moment of pure essence, out of which my dad soon emerged, quietly and simply completing the blessing, no words, but for tears, to interrupt the sacred flow. Later, I wanted so much to ask my dad what came to him in that moment, on the wings of what memory or association came the tears. Realizing that it was my own need, that he would likely not even remember, I didn't ask, but held the question within myself.

I was drawn to my dad in that moment, in a way that allowed frustrations gathered over the years to vanish. How I had wanted my dad to show emotion when I was a child, not of the anger and frustration that he seemed to bring home from the war, dreams, as of a career in medicine, unfulfilled, but the showing of love, of pain, the ability to engage heart to heart with his first-born as my mother did. As he was in my childhood, my dad was truly a man of his generation. As I came of age on the wave of feminism, coming home from college, more confident now in challenging my dad, I trained him over time to hug me and to kiss me, insisting that a handshake was not enough to join us as

father and son. My father has long since become someone for whom a handshake is never enough, hugging almost everyone, to a point of awkwardness at times. In that moment, as I pulled his talis around him, my arm upon his heaving shoulders, a trace of longing carried for so long within me vanished.

That which is broken remains and becomes holy, whether of tablets shattered in anger, of awareness of the world around diminished, or of love transformed and blessed with greater fullness. In the week of my father's aliyah in *Parashat Va'etchanan*, we read the Ten Commandments, the words of the fifth commandment going to my heart, *kabed et avicha v'et imecha/honor your father and your mother*. There is a thread of connection to this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Ekev*, in which Moses reminds the people of his anger when he came down the mountain the first time, seeing them worshipping the golden calf, and casting down the tablets. Referring to the first tablets, God says, *asher shibarta/which you broke*, and then referring to the second tablets, *v'samtam ba'aron/and you shall place them in the ark*. The rabbis understand this juxtaposition to mean that the shattered tablets are to be placed in the ark along with the whole tablets, both holy, dwelling together. It comes quickly to be a teaching not about shards of stone, but about shards of mind, of learning forgotten, of awareness dimmed. In a gentle image, the rabbis describe the letters upon the first tablets not as shattered with the stone, but as floating away on the wind. Playing on numerous water images in the Torah portion, *nachalei mayyim/brooks of water*, *ha'nachal ha'yored min ha'har/the brook that descends from the mountain*, *nachal* the root of *nachalah/inheritance*, I imagine the letters of the tablets diffused like ink in the waters of a stream that flows through the generations.

When we came to *Adon Olam* last Shabbos morning, the journey of prayer nearly complete, the person leading took what seemed to be such a long pause, waiting for a tune to come to him. As he began to sing, I gasped and began to cry, as did my father, with whom I was sitting then, though I don't believe my father was aware of my tears. It was the tune of an old American folk song, "The Water is Wide," "the water is wide I cannot get over, and neither have I wings to fly, build me a boat that can carry two, and both shall row, my love and I." For all the tunes that *Adon Olam* is sung to, I had never before heard it sung to "The Water is Wide," which was my mother's favorite song, one of my brothers singing it at her funeral. Memories carried on the wind, diffused in the stream of time; whether from a place of conscious connection or not, my dad leaned over to me and whispered, "it is such a beautiful tune."

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor