

Dear Chavraya,

It has been a week in which God's house, which is the whole world, has been riven with violence. By week's end the violence tore into what is for us a familial part of the house, with the slaughter of yeshiva students in Jerusalem. My heart breaks, for the bodies, books, and blood. Earlier in the week, it had been the familiar cycle of violence in the south, the relentless rocketing of S'derot and Ashkelon, the to-be-expected military response, powerful and impotent, a huge death toll in Gaza. And God weeps. This week's Torah portion is *Parashat Pekude*, an accounting of details of all that went into building the *Mishkan*, desert sanctuary; finite representation of God's infinite house.

For the rabbis, the *Mishkan* represented the entire world, its creation parallel to the creation of the universe. The house is all one, suffering in one corner is felt throughout, or it should be. How horrifying to celebrate the slaughter of human beings. From wherever we dwell in the house, how can we be callous to the suffering of others in another part of the house? How can we cause suffering? And God weeps. Where does it end? How do we mourn, holding ourselves in sorrow, still able to reach out to others?

The yeshiva where the killing took place is Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav, named for the first chief rabbi of the Land of Israel prior to the State, Rabbi Abraham Issaac Kook. He was known for the expansiveness of his soul, for his love of people, his yearning for redemption, of the Jewish people, of all people. As though to explain his reaching out across the divides that separate people, he is said to have reflected on the Talmudic maxim that "one should embrace with the right hand and rebuff with the left." He was, he claimed, entirely capable of rebuffing, but since there were so many people in the world who were so good at rebuffing, he decided to concentrate on the embracing.

The yeshiva that bears his name has often failed to honor the message and spirit of Rav Kook. Today I look beyond that, I weep for that, I weep for those who died learning Torah. With poignant irony, Rav Kook's own words speak to the churning emotions that crash upon the disparate shores of our souls. I share verses of a poem that Rav Kook wrote, hope striving to emerge from despair, yearning to share his inner light, not sure how.

*Expanses divine my soul craves.
Confine me not in cages,
Of substance or of spirit.
I am love-sick – I thirst, I thirst for God,
As a deer for water brooks.
Alas, who can describe my pain,
Who will be a violin to express the songs of my grief,
I am bound to the world; All creatures, all people are my friends,
Many parts of my soul are intertwined with them,
But how can I share with them my Light?*

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor