

Dear Chavraya,

It has been a week of synchronicity in the unfolding of Torah and of life. The Torah is referred to as Torat Chayim, a Teaching of life. As we discussed in the Thursday morning Torah learning at JP Licks this week, though inspiring abstract philosophical and theological thinking, the Torah itself does not deal in abstractions. The Torah is of this world, speaking the language of human beings, lashon b'nei adam, as the rabbis say, a guide to life, a Torat Chayim. The synchronicity between Torah and life is always there, if not always as apparent.

This week's Torah portion is parashat Sh'mini. Sh'mini means "eighth," referring to the eighth day in the dedication of the mishkan, the desert sanctuary, and the consecration of the priests to their sacred service in the sanctuary. In the midst of celebration, clad in their priestly finery, two sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, die tragically, plunging their father and the community into mourning. From this tragic moment, we learn from the Torah of life, Jewish ways in responding to death as part of life. In the dynamics that surround the death of Nadav and Avihu, the rabbis learn and teach various laws and customs that become part of the Jewish way in death and mourning.

In our own community, we began to learn this week, for the first time in association with each other as members of Nehar Shalom, the ways of response when a death has occurred. Coming together to help Naomi Storm enter the journey of Shiva, the seven days of mourning, following the death of her mother, we learn much about ourselves, and great beauty emerges. We learn about ourselves, about community, about each other. At the first gathering last night at Naomi's home, standing back at one point, I felt that I was witnessing the great beauty of a work of art unfolding. There is beauty in the reaching out of people to people. In this moment of life's unfolding it is called nichum aveylim, comforting of mourners. One does not need to have known the deceased or the mourner previously to bring the gift of comforting presence. As part of a community, the reaching out joins us and we come to know each other. At the threshold before leaving last night, I heard one person say to Naomi, "thank you for the opportunity to be here." The holy doing of a mitzvah is its own reward. We reach out to others, and we learn about ourselves and about life. It is the synchronicity of Torah and life. It is Torat Chayim, the Torah/Teaching of life.

As I wish you all a sweet Shabbos, and to Naomi and her family and to all who mourn, a Shabbos of comfort, I encourage each one to participate in the mitzvah of comforting the mourner, helping to make a kaddish minyan, helping our community to grow in the ways of life. Thank you. You are most welcome to call if you would like to talk before visiting.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor