

Dear Chavraya,

I spoke last night as part of a panel at the annual meeting of "Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries," an excellent interfaith social justice organization. Our challenge for the evening and beyond, until the world and its people is healed and whole, to share the wisdom of each tradition, seeking together the will and the way to move "Beyond Conflict to Compassion." We were asked to share from our own faith the sources of compassion from which we draw in reaching out to others. We were asked how we respond to those of our own who would hijack our traditions, who would stop up the wellsprings of compassion, and how with our own, as well, we foster cooperation, building bridges of peace. Thoughts interweave now, of interfaith sharing and of Shabbos coming.

Inspiration came through an open window, bird song on the breeze, small green shoots breaking through the softening ground....

Such beauty amid so much horror..., of nature's other side, of human brutality.

To each of my Bar and Bas Mitzvah students I give a small folding magnifying glass to carry with them. Given in memory of my mother, science teacher and naturalist, a magnifying glass has become for me a ritual object, helping to see the small miracles of Creation.

To see and be touched by the beauty of the world around us is to soften the soul...

I do not know that I could ever change an extremist's view of the world and of others, though I have tried and will continue to try in whatever context I might have such encounter. Dialogue with my own has proven the most difficult of engagements, face to face with the other who is me.

My greater concern is to reach young people and to plant within them seeds of beauty and understanding and hope, to create gardens of the soul in which nonviolence flourishes; in which twisted vines will not choke out the tender shoots of hope bravely rising toward the sun; in which the sweet song of small birds shall not be drowned out by the dissonant din of triumphal shouting. That is my goal as a teacher of Torah.

It takes courage to look at our selves...; (perhaps I should also give out small mirrors, to be held for oneself and then to be turned toward another), to see the image of God as it shines within each one.

There are texts that serve to be the mirror, some known by every Jew, others that are barely known that need to be brought out and learned and lived deeply. And there are ways of reading familiar texts that open them up along with our selves, to deeper meaning and possibility.

*Sh'ma Yisra'el, Hashem Elokeynu, Hashem Echad/Hear O Israel, God Our God, God is One.* The words are widely known, but more often than not their radical essence fails to be grasped. An affirmation of God's oneness, the *Sh'ma* is also an

affirmation of the inherent oneness of humanity. If God is one, and all people are created in God's image of oneness, then all people are one. Bearing witness through the *Sh'ma* to the fullness of its truth, we shall not be false witnesses.

We come to this Shabbos, *Shabbat Zachor/Shabbos of Remembrance*, themes bearing directly on our selves in relation to others, memories of pain and hope, leading to Purim, complex holiday of joy and salvation, brutality and violence, blood on our hands as well as theirs. *Zachor et asher asah l'cha Amalek/Remember what Amalek did to you...*, the warrior chieftain swept down upon us, a massacre, the desert journey just begun, newly freed slaves attacked at our weakest.

We need to remember hurt done to us in order that we not visit such hurt on others. Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev taught of *Shabbat Zachor: Every Jew needs to blot out that portion of evil called through the name Amalek that is hidden in her or his heart...*, for the potential for evil is in every person/*l'cho'ach ha'ra b'chol adam*.

Of offerings enumerated in all of their details, like so much of the Book of *Vayikra*, in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Tzav*, the rabbis find unlikely locus for teachings of peace. Flowing associatively from instructions for the peace offering, the *sh'lamin*, of the same root as *shalem/shalom, wholeness/peace*, we find the surest way to challenge the ways of Amalek. We are to go out and create a different reality, replacing evil with good, "*Bakesh shalom v'rodfehu/Seek peace and pursue it*" -- *seek it in your own place and pursue it in another place*.

I spend a lot of time following what I see as a stream of nonviolence that flows through the Torah just beneath the surface, at times bubbling up, at times a wellspring waiting to be tapped....

In their desert journey the Israelites come to the stream of the Arnon, to *Vahev b'Sufah/Vahev at the Red Sea*, a very strange verse that refers to the "Book of the Wars of God." The rabbis create a nonviolent transformation of a seemingly violent reference, *Vahev* becomes *ahava* / love; *sufa* becomes *sofa* / end. Then the rabbis tell of people engaged in conflict, differing opinions in learning, in life, but they do not move from out of each other's presence until in the end there is love.

So it is for us, we are to engage with each other and not move until we come to love each other. If we would counter our own extremism and triumphalism, and those who cannot extend a hand to the other, feeling their pain and their joy, these are the texts and ways of reading them that Jews need to know. So may we move beyond conflict to compassion, nurturing with love the gentle shoots of spring that rise toward hope.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor