

Dear Chavraya,

I received a letter from a friend this week that came as a reaching out from a place of deep spiritual loneliness. He spoke of his own yearnings for connection, of spiritual hunger not satisfied in relationships even with people of Torah. He was distressed with his own turning inward and away from those with whom connection seemed so difficult. In responding to him, I saw the letter itself as an affirmation of connection. In the awareness of loneliness, ironically, is the seed of connection. I share with you some thoughts I shared with my friend:

“Rather than turning away from those who seem ‘tone deaf’ to the music of the soul, there is connection in reaching out to uncover sparks of awareness, to ignite a memory of their own nigun deep within. There is great possibility that comes with creative loneliness. I think the loneliness of which you speak can be a seedbed, often watered with tears, but from which beautiful flowers may grow. I think of the *rakefet*, the cyclamen, one of my favorite flowers, growing wild in Israel, so delicately beautiful and strong, even with head bowed. One of my rebbes, Gordon Bok, singer, songwriter, sailor, writes of the wisdom to be learned from flowers when their flowering has passed: "it's a pity we don't know what the little flowers know, they can't take the cold November, they can't take the ice and snow, so they put their glories all behind them, bow their heads and let it go, and you know they'll be there shining in the morning...."

We are able to return to connection, to wholeness. Our own turning toward the morning is a reflection of natural cycles, times that are bright, of active give and take, and times that are more drab and dormant. The challenge is to stay engaged. This week's Torah portion, a double portion, *Parashat Vayakhel-P'kude*, is ostensibly about the raising up of the *Mishkan*, the desert sanctuary. More deeply, it is really about human connection, with each other, with oneself, and with God. The *Mishkan* becomes the focus, a collective project that all are involved with. Bubbling and bright with excitement, colors of fabric and of precious metals dazzling in the sun, even the lowest in spirit could not help but be roused.

It is all about connection, whether of tapestries joined together to form the walls that define the sacred space of a sanctuary, or of people joined together as the creators of sacred space. A word repeated many times throughout the *parasha* becomes its coda, *l'chaber/to join together*. Of all the gifts of so many people, of all the details coming together, the grand purpose is revealed, *l'chaber et ha'ohel li'hiyot echad/to join the tent together so that it should become one*. Of people joined together as friends, *chaver/friend* is of the same root as *l'chaber*. Joining together with others to create greater wholeness in the world around us, so we create greater wholeness in the world within us, each of us becoming our own *mishkan*, a dwelling place for God. In a beautiful meditation said before the *Ashrei* prayer

on festivals, words are drawn as a prayer from *Parashat Vayakhel*, *chiber kol ohalo, bintivot lev livlev/God joined together the entire tent, so may it blossom in the paths of the heart*. That is my prayer for my friend and for each of us, that we be as sanctuaries made whole, paths blossoming from heart to heart like flowers in the morning.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Victor