

Parashat T'tzaveh, 5774 (2014)

Dear Chavraya,

As *Torat Chayim*, Torah of Life, the Torah weaves connections and brings us to see its truths in all the places where life is lived, in places unexpected, in places unknown to us even a moment before the seed of awareness sprouts. I encountered Torah this week in the words of a young Syrian-American poet, words that give reality to a teaching in this week's Torah portion, *Parshat T'tzaveh*, words so haunting and wrenchingly beautiful, carried on a website called Living Nonviolence:

*There will be a time when we can eat together
When we will build homes out of abandoned tanks
Peace is a rusted recoil
We will sip from the cups made of old grenades
And shades of green are only worn by nature
There will be a time when the fences choose to sit with us
Instead of standing between us
Ameen
Amal Kassir*

Ameen/Amen, so may it be, her prayerful words an expression of hope in spite of all that would deny it. From the heart and hand of the poet, an eighteen-year old Muslim woman, comes the vision of a world transformed through the transformation of things that destroy. All things are formed of material substance and given their use through human will and ingenuity. Whether to be used for good or evil, all things are held in the balance of human intent, from the same steel to create sword or scalpel, and once formed, the use or misuse of things is in our hands. Things have no mind, but humans do. A single stream of God's thought as it flows from the horror that unfolds in Syria today and from a verse of Torah. In *Parashat T'tzaveh*, there is to be placed on Aaron's forehead a small diadem engraved with the words, *Kodesh LaShem/Holy to God*. It is an expression of intent and direction, of hands and heart directed to Heaven in all that we do. And just a bit further on, *Aaron shall lift away the crookedness of the holy things/v'nasa Aharon et avon hak'doshim*. Even holy things, things dedicated for sacred use, can be made unholy through ill intent, made crooked, turned away from higher purpose. All things in their beginning, as drawn from creation's gifts, have the possibility of holiness. From ore that is drawn from the ground can be fashioned tanks or tractors, steel to hurt or heal, the sword or scalpel. On Aaron's task to raise up things to be fit for holy service, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch speaks from nineteenth century Germany of things that are removed

“from that which is their purpose.... Their condition is one that contradicts the idea of their consecration.” All things created to destroy contradict the intent of creation itself, the very word by which we speak of the world’s coming to be.

The young poet envisions the raising up of weapons of war to be for holy purpose. Of tanks and rifles, grenades, uniforms, and fences, all things that divide and destroy transformed to be as they might have been from the very beginning with different intent, gifts of earth to be shaped by human hand and heart and mind. It is the vision of the prophets, Isaiah and Micah, of swords turned to plowshares and spears to pruning hooks, *lo yisa goy el goy cherev, lo yil’ m’du od milchamah/nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*. It is the vision of Torah, all things to be “Holy to God,” and it is the vision of a young Syrian poet. It is all *Torat Chayim*, the Torah of Life. So may it be.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor