

Dear Chavraya,

Anticipating our community meeting on Sunday, I read this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Emor*, through the lens of community. Like new blossoms suddenly open before us, the Torah reveals new teaching when our eyes are open to its possibility, new insights when our hearts are able to understand. As in awakening to the splendor of tulips open among the daffodils, their time overlapping in this slowly emerging spring, I giddily awoke to the juxtaposition of two teachings whose connection with each other I had never made before.

One of the teachings is a quintessential expression of community and its purpose, a *mitzvah* whose sacred doing can only be done among us, only if we are together. The other teaching emerges from an enumeration of the festivals of the Jewish year, times of gathering to celebrate with each other. Both are about being in each other's presence, all of us together forming community. The first is a verse in two parts, and so the *mitzvah*, *v'lo t'cha'l'lu et shem kodshi/do not hollow out My holy name/v'nikdashti b'toch b'nei Yisra'el/but let Me be sanctified among the children of Israel* (Lev. 22:32). Through a string of interpretive connections, this verse becomes the basis of ten as *minyan*, symbolic of Jewish community. It is the basis for *Kiddush Ha'Shem/Sanctifying God's Name*. The primary term for martyrdom, *Kiddush Ha'Shem* becomes more importantly a way of life, transcending death in the way that we live. Maimonides writes that *the entire house of Israel/kol beit Yisra'el, is commanded concerning Kiddush Ha'Shem*. Turning it into a *mitzvah* of life, the Slonimer Rebbe amplifies Maimonides' words and says that the Jew is obligated in the way of *Kiddush Ha'Shem, kol y'mei cha'yav/all the days of one's life*.

Kiddush Ha'Shem is about the good that we do, each of us, and all of us. God's name is sanctified among us in the good that we can do together that we cannot do alone. It is in reaching out to help others in ways greater than what one person can do. It is in the learning of Torah in *chevrusa*, in partnership, blessed by the insights of others that take us to a place of deeper understanding within ourselves that we could not get to alone. It is about learning to navigate differences, a skill and a way that is only possible in relationship with each other. It is about song raised in many parts, each voice special and needed, but so much richer as both melody and harmony in relation to another. It is about children learning from many teachers, and realizing that they too are teachers, their own gifts affirmed in the intergenerational gathering of community, every child representing the future, each one loved for who they are. In all the ways of our gathering and creating something greater than ourselves, God is sanctified among us.

Immediately following the sacred call to sanctify God's name among us, the enumeration of the festivals begins with its own call to come together. That is the

connection that I had never made before. If God's name is to be sanctified among us, we need to come together. The festivals as *mo'adim/gatherings* are a call to come together. Moses is told to announce to the people *God's appointed times for meeting.... Mo'ed* is about gathering in both time and space. The *Ohel Mo'ed* is the Tent of Meeting, a place of gathering in space, a communal home. The festivals as *mo'adim* are sacred moments of gathering in time. The root of *mo'ed, ya'ad*, means "to appoint." It is the root of *edah/community*, a gathering by appointment, with intention. It is the root of *ye'ud*, the unique purpose that each of us brings to the collective endeavor, each one needed for the gifts of their own presence.

As tulips blossoming among the daffodils, we are the garden, new insights emerging, new teaching revealed that we could not learn alone. Gathering together in communal meeting, appointed time and place, each one needed, God sanctified among us.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor