

Dear Chavraya,

In the emerging light and wintry cold of an early morning walk around the pond this week, Mieke and I began to notice more swans than usual. We began to count them. Along the far side of the pond, we counted six swans in three pairs. Each one of such graceful beauty, so are swans in relation to each other. Known to mate monogamously, often with the same partner for life, swans most often appear in pairs and so an even number there upon the water. Of gracefulness beyond form, swans become a symbol of romantic love and faithfulness. Musing on the nature of swan relationships, Mieke and I walked quietly, hand in hand. Rounding a bend a short distance further on, we peered out into the vague light of sky and water meeting to see another swan. I kept looking for its mate, assuming it to be just a bit further on, anticipating, then hoping, then worrying. As we made our way home, it became clear in the rising light that the seventh swan was alone.

The image of the seventh swan stayed with me through the week. Acknowledging my own projection, it became a metaphor of loneliness and alienation, coming to represent for me the loneliness of Yosef, a central theme in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Vayeshev*. One among twelve brothers, Yosef yet remains a solitary figure. Ten of the brothers are older and of different mothers. His own mother, Rachel, has died and, Binyamin, her only other child is still of tender years. Favored by his father, Yosef is hated by his brothers. Dreaming dreams and binding sheaves, Yosef yearns for connection. More than arrogance and visions of grandeur, that is the deeper meaning of his dreams. He tells of his dream, as though amazed himself: *we were piling up sheaves in the middle of the field/b'toch ha'sadeh and lo! my sheaf arose and remained standing upright; and lo! your sheaves formed a circle around it and bowed down to my sheaf!* Binding sheaves becomes a metaphor of human connection. All working together, the brothers are not simply in the field, but *within the field/b'toch ha'sadeh*. They are within a place of common embrace, none outside the circle, none swimming alone without a mate.

It has been a fuller day than anticipated, and Shabbos has come. I regret and apologize that I cannot finish gathering and binding thoughts as I had hoped to do. I leave you with the image of the seventh swan and ask you to gather your own sheaves, to form your own *d'rash*, thoughts that come of your own seeking and imagining. May we all be as sheaves bound together in community, as an expanding circle of swans upon the water, leaving none to swim alone. As the seventh swan, so we come now to the seventh day, a day of Yosef's yearning fulfilled, all the others, of swans and days, gathering to its light.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor