

Dear Chavraya,

I had so hoped to share with you today in a fuller context of Torah the experience of bringing so many donations from among us to the Boston Warm day shelter. I have had to spend much of the day tending to water damage in the shtibl and in our home and am now left with too little time, such becoming its own metaphor and reminder.

It was deeply moving through the week to see the contributions of food and clothing pile up on the porch. It is particularly fitting to have delivered it all today, the approach to Shabbat Sh'kalim, the Shabbos of the Shekels, an early reminder in ancient times that each person was to bring a half shekel for the upkeep of the Sanctuary. A half shekel was a very small amount, thus insuring that all could participate equally, teaching that each one is but a half, needing another to complete the shekel, allowing each to be whole through community. The Torah portion itself, *Parashat Mishpatim*, offers a fuller context for the theme of Sh'kalim, a context of responsibility for each other, of being one with the most vulnerable among us. Laws become guides for living in the way of justice, holiness in the nature of life lived with people. So we are not to charge interest on loans, we are to leave the corners of our fields for the poor and landless, allowing fields to lie fallow in the seventh year, the Sh'mita year, as this year reminds, and in the fallow fields the landless and the landed, shoulder to shoulder, gather food that grows of itself. The lesson is brought home in relation to real people; *you shall not grieve a stranger; you shall not let any widow or orphan feel their dependent state.*

When I arrived in front of the shelter housed at the Old South Church, the first person to offer to help carry bags from the car was himself homeless. I stayed in the shelter for a little while after the delivery was made, taking in the people and the mood, both weary and calm. A volunteer described the mood to me as both "intense" and "peaceful." And so the contradictions that offer their own cohesion and hope. The director brought me into the "inner sanctum," a storeroom of large, heavy plastic lockers, some red and some black, about a hundred of them. "They contain whole lives," I was told, "we pray in here, amidst so much life." I looked around and saw the massive, rough-hewn foundation stones that support the church above. The prayers offered in that space become the foundation stones for all the prayers offered above, and for our own as well.

I was told of a homeless couple who donated sweaters they had bought at Goodwill that turned out not to fit them, "there is so much generosity here, so much generosity." So we are each but half a shekel, each giving in our own way. As I approached the door to leave, I noticed that boxes of granola bars that we had contributed were already open and on the food table, and a large container of ground coffee waiting by the coffee machine. We each give in our own way, and so we each receive. On the half shekel whose giving we affirm on this Shabbos, the Torah commentator known as the Malbim teaches, *every individual is but half and not a complete entity, needing to join with another until becoming as something whole/ad ya'aseh k'davar shalem.* So may we become whole in relation to each other and with all with whom we share this earth and God's image, and so may we bring the wholeness of justice to our society.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor