

Dear Chavraya,

It is still so beautiful to me, whether gently falling or wildly swirling snow. The weather's challenge is a metaphor for how we see people, the effort to see good and beauty instead of, or in spite of, harshness and coldness of spirit. There is the coziness that comes with storms, the neighborliness, that extra effort to engage with others, to be helpful. The storms of this winter have brought out the entire range of human emotion, exhilaration, wonder and awe, trepidation and fear, weariness and wariness, kindness and meanness. In the same block, people help a driver to move a snow-stuck car, while others argue over who has rights to a parking space one had dug out originally and another cleared from a snowplow's wake. So too, we learn of ourselves in new ways, our responses to damaged "things," the failure of "stuff," the meaning of sanctuary. We learn to look more deeply within, to take in stride, all the while knowing how minor the losses, the inconveniences, for most of us. We pause and think of storm losses in other places in recent times, or of the losses that come to so many through human violence, or through illness and tragedy. We learn and we keep going, appreciating the power of gently falling flakes, each one so fragile in itself, so mighty in the company of a multitude.

Among all the new terms learned or appreciated in new ways this winter, such as ice dams and snow rakes, I heard reference on NPR this week to "storm rage." I had never heard the term before, not that it was hard to figure out. I was saddened by the phrase and the reality it reflected. I thought immediately of the people helping shovel out a car, or of neighbors checking on each other. During times of social stress, we are challenged to bring out the best in our selves and each other. We have an opportunity to bring out and celebrate "storm love," the kindness of word and deed that joins people to one another. Cultivated amidst the storms of winter, such love can become a gift that brings greater beauty to the blossoms of spring.

In the way of our dwelling with each other as neighbors, of loving each as ourselves, do we allow God to dwell among us. It is the lesson of life lived with people in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat T'rumah*. Far from an ancient set of instructions intended only then for freed slaves journeying to freedom, seeking purpose and meaning, so it is for us, instructions for life. We are all journeyers and sojourners on the way, seeking connection with God and each other, meaning in the midst of life's storms. All the people are called to give from their own possessions and donate to the common good what their hearts move them to give. And from all that is given, God says, *and they shall make Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them/v'asu li mikdash, v'shochanti b'tocham*. God does not need a sanctuary, a *mishkan* in which to dwell, but in our creating it together, so shall God dwell among us. God's motherly presence, as in *Sh'chinah*, is felt among us when we *dwell/shochen* together as sisters and brothers. The word for neighborhood is *sh'chunah*. In being a neighborhood of people joined to each other, looking out for each other, so God dwells among us, and then "it's a beautiful day in the neighborhood."

Among all of the items described in *Parashat T'rumah*, each to be fashioned in the building of the *Mishkan*, the smallest, and by itself seemingly the least significant,

are the hooks to hold the curtains that give shape and cover to the sanctuary. The hooks are called *vavim*, as in the letter *vav* that becomes the conjunction *and*. Joining one to another, we are each as the hooks in the sanctuary, each of us meant to join one to another. The need for each of us to be that *vav* of human connection is all the more important in the midst of stress and challenge, in the midst of storms of weather and life. In human connection, God dwells among us. In the flow of "storm love," we illumine winter's deepest beauty, giving to God and people sanctuary from the storm.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor