

Dear Chavraya,

Winging home from Montreal, sharing thoughts that had begun to form in the airport, among people on the way, nexus of life. I had gone to be with David Fainsilber, joining him and Ali and their family for the funeral of David's father, Harry, of blessed memory. Joined with the one remembered and brought to rest, and with all of the others who have made their way, we bring of ourselves to a funeral and the common gift of tears. In the gift of connections renewed, of stories learned, of songs and words that weave together people, time, and worlds, a funeral too is a nexus of life.

I learned much of David's father, wishing I could have learned more of him through relationship in life, though knowing now how much I really do know of him in knowing his son. I learned he was a "people person," never one to miss a party, a lover of life. One whose life began in the midst of hell, a child of the Holocaust and child of survivors, he was one who could have sought to slake his thirst from the bottomless well of bitterness. But he didn't. He chose life, and he lived it fully, giving to others, each day a gift, reaching for tomorrow. A math teacher whose students were far more than numbers to him, he filled each role with joy and purpose, father, husband, son, brother, friend. Significantly older than his youngest sister, he was and remains her hero. A most humble and quiet hero, he taught of life in approaching death, reaching out to friends to say goodbye, asking of those who came to visit or who listened at the other end of the line if there was anything they needed to say, breathing his last at home, at peace.

In the car to the cemetery, we listened to a CD that David had prepared for friends and family, his father singing the folk songs he loved, old time songs, timeless in their telling of life and love, and Harry's voice, his pulsing rhythm of life, a timeless gift. Even in its making, the recording was a gift in two directions, joining generations, as it does now and will continue to do. Harry had earlier recorded himself, though lamenting he had never been able to play with a band. More adept in technology and its ways today, David added instrumental tracks to the original recording, including his own playing, giving his father the band he had wished for.

A gift of love, reciprocity in the giving and receiving, the two become as one to affirm and raise up the other, teachings offered as a gift in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Naso*. In the dryness of its details, a gift emerges from the midst of the portion. From each of the tribes, twelve princes gather gifts from among their people, bringing them with great ceremony on the day of dedicating the sanctuary, on the day that Moses had completed assembling all of the details, *b'yom kalot Moshe*. From the beautiful phrase, *b'yom kalot Moshe/on the day Moses completed*, a word play on *kalah* as bride emerges, Rashi offering it with delight, *on the day of bringing a bride to the chupah*. A day of dedication, of sanctuary and home, is a setting of love to be honored with gifts of heart and soul. It is called *parashat n'si'im/the portion of the princes*, but it is not only about the heads of the tribes, not only about leaders, then or now. It is about each of us, all the people as leaders. *Nasi/prince* is one who raises up the people, even as the prince is raised up by the people. It is a holy dynamic, a sacred dance, for all of us to do with and

for each other. It is of the same root as the name of the *parsha*, an imperative form, *Naso/Raise up!* It is about the raising up of each one, counting in a census, making clear that each one counts. The root *nasa/raise up, carry, bear* tells of the essence of giving, not to compete or put down, not to aggrandize oneself or diminish another, only to raise up, to carry each other, a legacy of wholeness raised up beyond time. *Nasa* is the root of *nisu'in/marriage*, a term of endearment, of love and reciprocity.

So dry at first, the portion of the princes appears as a list filled with details, over and over again telling of what each one brought for the sanctuary, weights and measures, silver and gold, offerings of field and flock. For twelve days, gifts brought by each prince, *nasi echad la'yom nasi echad la'yom/one prince to a day one prince to a day*, each one special, days flowing together. The details are all the same in each day's giving, and so in chanting the same beautiful trop in the telling of each day, only the name of the giver varying, all the gifts exactly the same. Underscoring the specialness of each one, not as part of a list, but as that day's only giver, there is no conjunction between any of the days. It is a beautiful vision of harmony, giving as a way to bring people together, honoring each other on the path to a higher good, giving without competition or jealousy, giver and receiver as one, all of equal value. Yet each gift is distinct, the Slonimer Rebbe teaches, because each one is brought with the special *kavannah*, the special intention and thought of its giver.

Giving and receiving, David and Harry, stories shared among all who gathered, a nexus of life, so many gifts shared, all the same and all different. It is in the way of our giving and connecting with each other. A vision offered through Torah, it is ultimately in the *kavannah* of our giving and receiving, not to compete or to put down, but to raise up and affirm, *naso/raise up!* In Harry's gift to David, shaped and fashioned as David's gift to Harry, a gift to all of us, a song rising beyond time, his memory a blessing.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor