

Dear Chavraya,

I apologize that I am offering very little by way of a Torah letter this week. In fact I have been writing and thinking and phone calling and emailing and wrestling with jagged feelings all day. As you may be following in the Advocate, the controversy that some segments of the Jewish community continues to pursue concerning the new Roxbury mosque has again come to the fore. It actually began a few weeks ago when Gov. Patrick spoke at the mosque to over a thousand Muslims from across the state. Gubernatorial candidate Tim Cahill attacked the governor for “pandering to terrorists.” As I wrote about in an earlier Shabbos letter, a group of interfaith clergy met with Cahill to ask him to apologize, which he refused to do. Rabbi Eric Gurvis spoke at a press conference at the mosque following that meeting. In the next week’s Advocate, Charles Jacobs sarcastically attacked Rabbi Gurvis. The following week, an open letter signed by seventy rabbis was published calling Jacobs to task for the nature of his criticism and for continuing to castigate those who engage in dialogue. And so it continues.

We are challenged in this week’s Torah portion, *Parashat Chukkat*, to sanctify God’s name in the manner of our interactions with each other. As the people clamor for water following Miriam’s death, by whose merit there had been water, Moses is told to speak to a certain rock and water would come forth. Instead, Moses became enraged at the people and cursing them he began to flail at the rock. It is for this way of response in a difficult moment that Moses is told he will not enter the Land. He had been called upon to sanctify God’s Name in the way of his interaction with the people, and he failed. “Sanctifying God’s Name,” *Kiddush HaShem*, is the term used for martyrdom. More importantly it comes to refer to a way of life lived in relation to others that brings honor to God’s Name and to our own.

There is a story in the Talmud told of Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach. Rabbi Shimon purchased a donkey from a non-Jewish merchant. Once home, Rabbi Shimon’s students found a diamond tucked into the halter of the animal. Knowing how he struggled to make ends meet, the students expressed delight at their teacher’s good fortune. Saying that he had only paid for the donkey, Rabbi Shimon sent his students to return the diamond. His loss restored, the merchant exclaimed, “Praised be the God of Shimon ben Shetach.”

So may God be praised through our deeds, in the way of our response to those of our own with whom we differ, and in the bridges we build with our neighbors.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor