

Dear Chavraya,

The week in Germany has been more intense and full than I could ever have imagined. It has been filled with meaning and struggle, with laughter at times and tears that come unbidden. Today began with meetings with government officials. This afternoon was so moving, visiting a refugee center. We met first with staff and with a Syrian man who had arrived recently with his family. Most beautifully, we then spent time with children at play. They and I laughed as I tried to dance with them to music that was playing. And then I cried. Hurrying toward Shabbos now, in this week of *Parashat Chukkat*, I share with you a short reflection that tells of the backdrop to this Journey of Remembrance and Hope. I send blessings to all of you, hoping that all are well.

With affection,  
Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor

### The Dust of Dachau

It had rained most of the day. The rain would do what I could not bring myself to do. I had never cleaned off the dust of Dachau that had caked onto my shoes the previous day. I couldn't bring myself to remove that dust, not wanting my shoes to ever be cleansed of their encounter with that place. I did not want to clean my shoes, to remove the residue of that earth of sand and ash, of blood and tears, sodden and dry, too fertile and ever fallow. I preferred for the dust to remain, carrying it as seeds of remembrance and hope, grains of sand to shake loose over time, left wherever our journey took us. Here and there a grain of remembrance, a sigh of connection, seeds of remembrance left on the sidewalk or in a café, on fine carpets or on the stairs of a bus, as another tear at a memorial site, wherever we were a link to what happened. The rain began the process I could not begin myself, cleansing rain that cleaned my shoes, God's tears that had begun to fall after I placed a stone at the ovens and stepped outside, *mayyim chayyim/waters of life*.

As I wanted to leave the dust on my shoes, I have wanted to hold the pure emotion felt at Dachau, to hold it in all of its pain and release, never to let go of those for whom I cried, to feel the catharsis of hot tears streaming down my face. It is the feeling of not wanting to leave *Shiva*, to go out from the house of mourning, wanting to remain close in time and place to the dead. But we have to go on. We get up and go outside, squinting in the light, realizing that somehow there still is light, light beyond the flickering glow of the memorial candle. We take the first steps to go on with the journey of life, letting the rain wash away the dust of the cemetery from our shoes. We continue on the path of life as a journey of remembrance and hope.