

Dear Chavraya,

Yesterday I participated in a hearing at City Hall. Along with other clergy, I had been asked to offer a religious perspective on legislation under consideration by the City Council. The *Collective Bargaining Ordinance* would allow tenants in large apartment buildings to speak with one voice when negotiating with property management. A very mild proposal, the ordinance in fact would require only one thing of large property owners, to meet with tenants collectively once every six months. The hope is poignantly simple, that by sitting down to reason together needs could be addressed and differences resolved without resort to the courts.

As I entered the City Council chambers, a man approached me and asked if I was a property owner. I answered that I was a rabbi. He then asked if I was on "their" side. I said, "You know, we are all on the same side, we are all here for the good of our city." When my turn came to speak, I referred to that exchange and then did something that has probably never before been done at a City Council hearing, I chanted from the book of Isaiah.

Unity among people is uniquely important to the themes of this Shabbos. With this Shabbos we begin a new book in our journey through Torah. Like each of the other four books, the fifth book of Torah, *D'varim / Words*, takes its name from the name of its first portion. This Shabbos of *Parashat D'varim* is also one of a number of Shabbatot during the year that is known by a special name. This Shabbat is known as *Shabbat Chazon*, the *Shabbat of Vision*, and immediately precedes *Tisha B'Av*. The ninth day in the Hebrew month of *Av* is a day of fasting and mourning for the destruction of both Temples and for numerous other tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people. It is a day of pained reflection on all that threatens our world. The ancient Temples in Jerusalem were understood to symbolically represent the world itself. How sobering then, to consider the teaching of the rabbis, that it was a lack of unity among people, the result of wanton hatred of one for another, that brought the fiery destruction of the second Temple in the year 70 of this era.

Shabbat Chazon takes its name from the first word, *chazon/vision*, of the special prophetic reading, or *haftarah*, selected for this Shabbat from the prophet Isaiah. In a stirring and challenging vision, which opens his entire prophecy, Isaiah offers words of warning and of hope. There is warning in the dire consequences of our failure to come together with each other. And there is hope in the certainty that we are capable of attaining the fruit of unity, the ultimate blessing of dwelling together in peace and unafraid.

Through the ancient words and the haunting melody to which they are chanted, used only for this *haftarah* and for the Book of Lamentations read on *Tisha B'Av*, Isaiah exhorts us, *Come now, let us reason/debate together, says God*. Rising to a crescendo of hope, Isaiah then says, *And I will restore your judges as at first and your counselors as in the beginning; afterwards you shall be called City of Righteousness, Faithful City*.

So these words came to be chanted in the City Council chambers, offered as a prayer that in coming to talk, to reason together, all of us as tenants on this earth,

we shall be a city of righteousness, a faithful city. As Jerusalem was seen to represent the world itself, so may the entire world be our city. On the eve of *Tisha B'Av*, a day of destruction remembered, a way of hope is given; *Come now, let us reason together.*

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor