

Dear Chavraya,

Much of the last few days has been taken up with a death, unexpected, untimely. Marty Federman was a friend, a fellow-activist for social justice and peace. Whether for the sake of Israel and Palestine, whether for neighborhoods of Boston, Jews and Muslims, people in need, Marty was there. He often spoke of his affection for Nehar Shalom and wished he lived closer, joining us to daven on occasion, coming to hear Rabbi Arik Ascherman whenever he was in town and speaking here. Marty was a close friend of Arik, often joining Mieke and me to share Shabbos dinner with Arik.

Returning late from the cemetery, some distance from Boston, my thoughts are scattered, trying to weave together strands of the day as woven on the loom of life. As I shared through words of remembrance for Marty, probably true for many of us, the sorrows of the world so often became for him interwoven with the sorrows of his own life. Brokenness in the world becomes refracted through the shards of our own life's lenses, and brokenness within our selves becomes the imperfect vessel in which we hold the world's tears. And yet, each teardrop becomes one of those precious lenses through which the sunlight of possibility shines, a prism bending rays of sunlight into all the colors of the rainbow.

Beneath the arch of Heaven's embrace, colors joined as one in multi-hued beauty, we seek our way upon this earth that is the valley of the shadow of death. Aware of mortality, we seek meaning nevertheless, in spite of, in love with, not as foreboding, but as affirmation. This world in which we live is the valley of the shadow of death. We live with that awareness and in that awareness we affirm life. So painful at times the realities of life, death that comes untimely, cruel and callous twists, small deaths along the way of life when things are not as we hoped they would be. In the frailty of life is also its grandeur, that life comes to be at all the ultimate miracle, and that we are given then to make of it what we will, and we do. The valley of the shadow of death is the valley of life. The challenge is to see the sunshine that pierces the clouds in the valley skies, to receive as a kiss the teardrops that fall as rain, light shining through as all the colors of love and joy, embracing all.

Of life affirmed in spite of death, much teaching is offered in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Emor*. Instructions are given to the *kohanim* in relation to death, to remain apart, not as though immune, or separate from, but to teach of life in the face of death, to remind of life fully lived as a way of transcending death. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch teaches on this parsha the way of immortality in relation to each other: *The ideal of the nation does not know death, "the community never dies," and under this concept of the "eternal whole," every individual who is part of the community and has lived for the community has a share in this immortality even here below. With every pure fiber of one's life on earth lived in faithfulness..., one will remain interwoven forever with the eternal essence of the community....*

To the degree that we help to make the world a better place, so shall we have a place in the world to come. It is the hope expressed in the words offered as blessing following each *aliyah* when one is called to the Torah, *chayyei olam natah b'tocheinu/You have planted within us eternal life*. In helping to bring a better time,

we become part of its dawning. Even then, there will be much to do to heal relationships with others, to bring wholeness to the small worlds of our own lives. As Marty sought to do in the great world all around, so may we strive to do in worlds both great and small, until the sun of a new day shines through all the brokenness in the valley of life and we come to the day that is all Shabbos.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor