

Dear Chavraya,

In the swirl and swell from Yom Kippur to Sukkos, I feel like a vessel on the tide that is both empty and very full. We are all, I am sure, tired still from fasting and the deep introspective work and wrestling of the days just past, and yet that is also what fills us so deeply, a fatigue of meaning. I had hoped to write a full message today drawing from a rich discussion around the Torah table at JP Licks on Thursday morning. That learning was part of the fullness of these days. The richness of insights and the living reality of Torah within us awakened and strengthened me far more than a few more hours of sleep could have done. As it was among us through the amazing journey of the Yamim Nora'im, as it was around the Torah table, it is all about connections. I will share a few fragments of not so random thoughts, formed and forming, on connections of people, nature, God, all that fills the emptiness of body, even of spirit in moments of longing for the closeness that has been, for the tears that flowed so easily, as though called forth and beckoned to their Source in the *Makor Mayyim Chayyim/Source of Living Waters*.

One of my favorite moments is in the minutes before Kol Nidre, as people are gathering to the shtibl in body and spirit, sitting and singing an endless *nigun* together, a song without words, beyond words, the melody of longing, of brokenness and wholeness all as one, a reflection of all that we bring among us, that we have within us, brokenness and wholeness, all held as one in loving hands and hearts. The spirit of that *nigun* appeared unbidden at the very end of Yom Kippur, as though framing the day, reminding of the loving hands and hearts, the yearning for wholeness that finds fulfillment in the way of our response to each other. Blessings come sometimes in ways that are beyond us, in ways we wish would not appear, but when they do they beg for us to behold and be held in all of their ironic beauty. At the very end of *Ne'ilah*, as those who were present are aware, one of our number fainted. Space was made around her, as several doctors became their prayers and said *hineni/here I am* as together they brought their ways of healing through skill and spirit. It was clear that we needed to pause in our prayers of words, realizing that ending our own fasting could wait as the ambulance arrived. As the light of day turned to the early light of night, we were held in a most beautiful *nigun* of healing, the melody of Debby Friedman's *Mi Shebeyrach*, surrounding our friend with song until she had been so carefully carried away to be tended to. And then we concluded Yom Kippur, richer in the blessing of connection with one person who could have been any one of us, who at one time or another and in one way or another is each of us. For all of the embarrassment she felt at first, as we have talked since then, she has come to feel the deep blessing of connection and love that surrounded her.

And the next day a group of people came to set up the sukkah, the physical work taking us from the inner space of the days of turning to the world outside, body as well as soul in God's service. One of my favorite moments of the year comes on the day after Yom Kippur, when as I have done for so many years, I go out into the woods with saw and axe and cut *sch'ach*, the green boughs with which to cover the sukkah. I have been going to the same spot since my children accompanied me, there blessing the trees and asking for their blessing before beginning to carefully prune from among them. It is a connection with nature

and earth that is part of the preparation for Sukkos. Sukkos becomes a reminder of the urgent need to care for the fragile shelter of Earth that is home to all of us. I am raised up by hope in the work of so many in these days, by the Pope's call to action, by our own Rav Shoshana Meira's singing in Washington, calling on us to rise up in hope and care for this world so hurting.

And that is where our Torah learning took us on Thursday morning in the deep teaching of connection and wholeness with the earth and with each other in three words at the very end of Moses' song. As the *nigun* carried through Yom Kippur, at its beginning and at its end, the Song of Moses is the fullness of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Ha'azinu*. Moses calls to heaven and earth to *give ear/ha'azinu* and to bear witness to his song that is a call to us, a call awaiting response. Calling to the grandeur of all creation, the very last words of the song rise to a crescendo of connection, the deep, profound connection of people and earth. Layered with association, the words are of connection and responsibility; *v'chiper admato amo/and God's people will atone for God's earth*. We are responsible for the earth because we are of the earth and one with the earth, *adam/human, adammah/earth*. These are the final words said as earth is sprinkled by the *Chevra Kaddisha* upon one about to return to the earth from which all come and return to. So in life, we atone for all the harm done to earth through the loving care that is so needed, as with the loving care given to a person faint and weak.

*Ha'azinu/give ear* is from *ozen/ear*. As the source of balance is in the inner ear, so we delighted in realizing on Thursday morning that from the same root, *izun* means "equilibrium." In the connection that comes in all the ways of our being together, in the ways of caring and seeking, of wholeness and brokenness, we seek equilibrium. And so with earth and among nations and peoples, may we help to bring equilibrium, to restore balance to all that is. Before all that needs to be done, so easy to feel empty, and receiving all of the hope and possibility that flows as a sweet *nigun* from among us, may we feel as a vessel so full.

Shabbat shalom and Chag same'ach,  
Rabbi Victor