

Dear Chavraya,

Most often when I sit down to write these weekly reflections on the intersection of life and Torah, a moment whose intention and focus I cherish, I know well what I want to share and where I want to go. At times I have carried an idea for weeks or months, knowing that it was meant for a particular Torah portion, eagerly waiting for the confluence of time and Torah turning. At times I have even held an idea for a year, receiving it just a little too late for the portion in which it was meant to be shared. I leave a note then to myself in that portion's file, though often not needing the note, to be reminded and reunited with a long-gestating idea one cycle of Torah later.

Most often, an idea floats as a feather on the breeze as a new week emerges from the womb of Shabbos time, a new sprig of Torah on which to alight. Watered with the laughter and tears of serendipitous human encounter, the idea germinates through the week, often surprising me with just how it has evolved, telling me of its journey only when I sit down to be with it uninterrupted. Events in the worlds around us and within give shape to the shaping, Torah and life meeting, only then the context known in which to share.

There are times when a thought is so strong, an idea so demanding, a need in the world so powerful in its call to be addressed, that I know that is what I must speak to regardless of the week's Torah portion. I think then of a Yiddish folk tale told by the great Jewish storyteller Peninnah Schram. An itinerant *maggid/preacher/teacher/teller of tales* is asked how he always knows what story to tell. He answers with a story...: a military officer known as a marksman is riding through a village on his horse. He sees one hundred targets drawn on the side of a barn with a bullet hole in the very center of each target, one hundred targets and one hundred bull's eyes. Amazed, the officer asks a child who the marksman is, for he must meet him. The child laughs and says it is Nar, the town fool, no marksman he. The child explains that Nar shoots first and then draws the circle around the hole.

It is all Torah, all life. Somehow, in turning to Torah we find the words and the context in which to address whatever it is in the world and in our hearts that most needs to be addressed in that moment, in that week, in that week's yearning for Shabbos sweetness. Preferring not to think of marksmanship with a gun, but with words of Torah directed to the mark, I think of the rabbis wrestling toward meaning, just like us, and their saying of Torah as context for life, *hafoch ba, hafoch ba, d'kula ba/turn it, turn it, everything is within it*. Sometimes we know what we most need to bring forth, what we need to speak about, to share, to give voice to, and so we create the context for the telling, a context that in truth is already there in the Torah's own turning. The *maggid's* story is contained in the very word *Torah*, whose root means to direct to a mark, and so the same root as the word for *teacher/morah*, for *parents/horim*, those who direct children toward the mark, offering guidance, helping them to find the way.

And there are times when I sit down with little time to think or write and I don't know what to say, when the week that was seems to be a blur, worlds swirling

together into one, joys and sorrows of people I've encountered and of the world so beautiful and fragile singing out and crying out, Shabbos beckoning.

Seeking the way together, we come to this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Ki Tisa*. At its beginning is the law of the half shekel, that each one is to give but a half shekel for the sake of the community and its needs. The rich are not to give more and the poor are not to give less, each one needed, each one equal in the bringing of their half shekel. There is no higher and lower, no greater and lesser, all are equal in the bringing of their half shekel. In community and its upkeep, in the home and in the world, we are all equal, each but a half and needing the other to be whole. Using words, not guns, we direct our words to the mark and draw the circle round, each one included, all within, in the turning and the telling.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor