

Dear Chavraya,

A large format hardcover edition of "Make Way for Ducklings" is lying on the sofa in my study, just where I left it after reading it to little Leo. We snuggled together in the morning of their leaving day, the day of their going out, on to their next journey. We shared the words and pictures, counting all eight ducks to be sure they were all there, just as we had seen their likeness in bronze in the Public Gardens, right there following Mrs. Mallard, Jack, Kack, Lack, Mack, Nack, Ouack, Pack, and Quack. As we said good-bye to the ducks, I gently tapped Leo on his little *keppie* with the closed book, explaining that my father, his "more Zaydie," had done that with his children when he finished reading a book to me or my siblings, and so I had done that with my children, beginning with his mom when she was a little girl. And then I put the book down, right in the spot where it lies now, nostalgia and longing making it so hard to return the book to its shelf.

It had been a wonderful visit, the house filled with the delicious chaos of children and grandchildren, the varied needs of a four year old and a one and a half year old. Ruby was playful, her bright smile and dancing eyes lighting up the room, but cautious in keeping proximity to her parents, not quite ready to go off with Oma and Zayde. There was something remarkable, deep and beautiful, in our connection with Leo this visit. It was the first time in the scattered times of our being with him that we encountered a child who had come to a place of cognitive awareness in which to engage deeply with ideas and feelings. We were touched by a deep sense of connection, held in the web of generations unfolding, spellbound in the knowledge that what we shared now would be remembered as part of our evolving relationship, memories to bridge the span of time and space.

On the way to the airport, Leo was quiet. When we arrived curbside to unload luggage before parking the car, then to linger inside with long goodbyes, Leo said his throat was burning. Concerned that he might be about to throw up, suddenly dreading what was to come, an airplane flight with a sick child, his parents took him away from luggage and people. It happened a few times, perhaps coming down with something, but for each time there was fortunately nothing to show. Once we settled near the security point for their gate, beyond which I could not go, we talked and played and reminisced about our visit. Speaking into a moment of pause, with all the delicate strength and insight carried on his four-year-old voice, Leo said so simply, "I wasn't sick, I am just feeling sad because we're leaving Boston."

Touched so deeply by this little one's insight into his own feelings and by the ability to express them, I could feel the same burning in my throat, holding back tears as I hugged him and said that I felt sad too. Trying mightily then to be the adult, even the zayde that he called me to be, I told him that we would look ahead to the next visit and all that we would do, whether in Los Angeles or in Boston. I realized then that this had been much more than a trip for Leo. It had been a journey, one of the journeys of his life, a journey that he needed now to go out from in order to make his way to the next.

That is the teaching of this week's Torah portion, the second portion of two read as one, *Parashat Mattot-Massei*. *Massei* means journeys of.... In this portion, we see the unfolding and recording, the beginnings of reminiscence, not of one journey through the desert, but, as tradition has enumerated, of forty-two distinct journeys. The span from one place to another becomes its own locus of experience, each span its own journey. The Torah never speaks of the journey through the desert, in the singular, but of journeys, always in the plural. Life is not one journey from birth to death, but an ever-unfolding sequence of journeys, each one with its own teachings and insights to help us on the way to the next. The holy Baal Shem Tov teaches that the journeys of each person's life correspond to the desert journeys of Israel, and so we journey *me'masa l'masa*/from journey to journey....

I had never before understood the language at the beginning of *Parashat Massei*, perplexed until this year's reading by what seemed a strange construction, *And Moses wrote of their goings out to their journeys/et mo'tza'ey'hem l'massei'hem... and these are their journeys to their goings out/v'eleh massei'hem l'motza'ey'hem....* As Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch translates it, *Moses recorded their decampments for the continuations of their journeys..., and these are the continuations of their journeys following their decampments*. Going out, breaking camp, as it were, is always in order to begin the next journey, and every journey, each with its own stories, brings us to the next place of pause and reflection, of being together along the way. In their essence, the names of the two portions that become one tell the whole story. The name of the first portion, *Mattot*, *tribes*, *branches*, all as part of a greater whole, as branches to a tree, is formed of the root *natah*, which as *natah ohel* means "to pitch a tent...." The name of the second portion, *Massei*, journeys of..., as though unfolding, open to the future, is formed of the root *nasa*, which as *nasa ohel* means "to strike a tent," to pull up stakes....

The journeys of our lives are cyclical. We can't embark on the next journey until we go out from the one we are on. As the Torah records our journeys as a people, so we come to see the journeys of our own lives. There are those journeys, those stages and phases of our lives that we are only too ready to leave behind, yet they too are part of the unfolding of our lives that bring us to be who we are and who we are needed to be in this world. And there are those journeys that are so hard to say good-bye to, even as we try to look ahead, when at the road's edge we feel a burning in our throats.

In the sadness of parting, the Torah of life illumined through tears, I came to see in the preciousness of Leo's four-year old wisdom that the words he needed to hear from me are the words I need to hear from myself. Yes, we will look ahead to the next visit, the next journey. As hard as it is not to linger on the journey that was, I will do my best to take that volume of "Make Way for Ducklings" and place it gently back on the shelf with the other children's books. And when Leo and Ruby come to visit again, we will take it down, to read and remember and look ahead, stories across time, strands of love from journey to journey.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor