

Dear Chavraya,

I hope that all of you are well. I am feeling quite a bit better and have very much appreciated your good wishes and support. It has been a light month for offering much Torah commentary. At the same time, Torah is everywhere, the Torah of life, of books, of nature, of people. Just noticing details of Creation is Torah. While I have not been able to be at our Thursday morning JP Licks Torah learning these weeks, a group has continued to meet and learn together, for which I am so grateful. Torah has continued to emanate with the smell of roasting coffee from Centre Street.

This week's Torah portion is *Mattot-Massey*, one of the double portions to be separated in a leap year to have enough to go around for the extra weeks. *Mattot* means tribes, as Moses spoke to the "heads of the tribes of Israel." The root of this word for tribe, however, means staff, rod, or branch. Though a unit unto itself, every tribe is but one branch, part of a larger whole. As part of our own families, communities, peoples, and nations, we are all as one branch in the whole tree of humanity. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch speaks of *Mateh*, the singular of *Mattot*, as defining *each tribe as a 'branch' of the larger whole, with each branch working, through its own unique characteristics, to carry out the mission shared in common by the entire nation*. May this become the vision of every nation, of every tribe and people in relation to all other peoples. How beautiful such "tribalism" would be.

Of finding common roots that nurture many branches, I want to invite anyone who is able to make it to a very simple tree planting ceremony next Wednesday, July 22nd, at 10:30 A.M. at Nehar Shalom. Mieke and I had planned to plant a tree in the backyard to replace one that had died. The opportunity appeared to make it more than "just" planting a tree. There is a nascent local organization called "Roots and Wings," founded by Avi Davis, whom some of you have met in shul. Its purpose is to create opportunities for diverse groups of people to plant trees together, thereby expressing a commitment to pursuing peace through beneficial action. While starting with diverse groups in Boston, Avi's hope is to deepen the roots and spread the wings of the organization to bring Israelis and Palestinians together through the planting of trees. I have joined Avi and several others for planting a tree along the Jamaica way. If you are able to make it next Wednesday, please join us. If not, please send blessings for deep roots and gentle wings.

We are all joined together by common roots, beckoned by the wings of Noah's dove, enveloped in the *Sh'chinah's* wings, God's mothering presence. We are each as one branch, needing each other and all others to be a great and beautiful tree. Such is the hope of the prayerful words that we sing out upon completing each of the books of the Torah. This Shabbos we will complete the book of *Bamidbar/Numbers*, the fourth book, and call out upon completing the last words, *chazak, chazak, v'nitchazek/Be strong, be strong, and let us strengthen one another*.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor