

Dear Chavraya,

There are times when it seems that all we can do is cry out and search the heavens for a rainbow. There are times when we feel so weary of violence, strife, and danger, numb and depleted in body and soul. I try to imagine a social justice agenda, a peace agenda, locally and globally, and then I wonder how to prioritize, how to put one before another, all so important. A feverish world begs for surcease from abuse to climate and environment. Innocents continue to be cut down by bullets, across the land a sickness unabated that values the unbridled right to own guns more than human life. Immigrants arriving on Europe's shores in droves, those who would build fences on our own southern border, and on Yom Kippur we atoned for the sin of xenophobia, left to wonder of our own responsibility. In Israel and Palestine violence once again flaring into fire, so much pain, so hard to bear. Young people stabbed by young people. Slightly older young people called to respond. How to imagine the pain of our own people, friends and family, the terror, the fear in simply stepping out into the street? How to imagine the pain of Palestinians, stepping out into the street to shop or walk, wondering whether they shall return home or not, wondering when the grinding oppression will end? They are all our children, all our people, held in God's embrace beneath the rainbow's bleeding arch.

It is the week of *Parashat No'ach*, a portion that is filled with both destruction and hope. The outline of the story is very familiar, the flood, the ark, the rainbow, the chance to start over again. But it is deeper than that. Prior to the flood, the earth had become so filled with violence it could not be sustained. God weeps and wonders what went wrong, *and the earth had corrupted itself before the face of God, and the earth became filled with violence*. Too easy to blame God, violence itself was the flood, a warning of destruction brought upon ourselves, violence numbing us to its mundane horror day by day until it is too late. The Hebrew word for flood is *mabul*. Its root is *naval/to whither, to decay, to wear away*. Violence drains life and the world of meaning, violence done to earth and to each other. And God sees the horror of destruction and offers a rainbow sign, a covenant with all humanity that God will never again be an agent of destruction, *never again will I curse the ground..., nor will I ever again destroy every living thing... The days of the earth shall be forever; seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall never cease*. God's promise is sealed with the rainbow sign, a covenant between God and earth. An inverted bow, a sign of peace, God promises not to destroy again, waiting for us to respond in kind.

One of my favorite "ritual objects," almost as beloved as a magnifying glass and microscope, is a prism, a rainbow maker. Held delicately in our fingers to catch rays of sunshine, it doesn't work if held in a fist, needing to remain open to the light. Gently turning in order to receive and refract, rainbows appear upon the wall, upon the face of another, dancing there wherever we happen to be, every place a place in the sun. There is a beautiful phrase in Hebrew, *keshet de'ot/rainbow of opinion*. The rainbow is a blessing upon diversity, a reminder that in all the beauty of our uniqueness we emerge from the same source. If held in the rainbow path of one prism, a second prism turns the entire spectrum of color back into clear light, the source from which all color comes, the common soul of each one, as God is the source of all.

If we can make a rainbow, then perhaps we can fulfill its spirit too. Of a rainbow's seven bands of color, each one is distinct and bold, each one touching another, snuggling right up to, but not encroaching upon. The colors of the rainbow do not bleed one into the other, each one safe in its own place, all the needs of earth and people become as one, a banner and blessing of hope. Searching the heavens for a rainbow, we find it within ourselves.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor