

Dear Chavraya,

Of handprints and butterfly wings, images come to me. The haunted eyes of our own children, remembered among six million. The haunted eyes of immigrant children among us, our own children too, fearing their parents will be deported; the searing image of the lifeless body of a Syrian child who drowned in a sea that did not part. An image of eyes comes to me, eyes that stare back from six million mirrors, our own eyes when they do not see, when they avert the gaze of all the haunted eyes, the eyes that are seeking eye contact, human contact...; the fragile connection of handprints and butterfly wings.

This Sunday is the twenty-seventh day of Nisan, the month of our liberation, even when it hasn't been, the date of Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, observed this year on Monday. It is a time to be with our pain, but not to stay there. The day after Yom Hashoah comes, and then we need to go on, to make real what we have learned, to make their memories a blessing. Pesach has just ended. We remember the pain of slavery, of human degradation, and the glory of human striving, yearning and goodness. The day after Pesach comes, and then we need to go on, to make real what we have learned.

At the seder, we said the words, *b'chol dor va'dor chayav adam lirot et atzmo k'ilu hu yatza me'mitzrayim/in every generation a person is obligated to see themselves as if having personally come out from Egypt*. The obvious question beckons and pleads for answer, how to see ourselves in real terms as having come out of Egypt? The S'fas Emes, the Gerer Rebbe, answers with timeless power, teaching each generation to look at where there is need for an exodus in their time, where there is need for surcease from suffering, and help to make that exodus, that liberation, happen. It is a thread that runs through our history, the unfolding of our story through time. As we are obligated to see ourselves as having come out of Egypt, so for having come out from the Crusades, from endless pogroms, from Aushwitz.

And then, on the day after, how to make real what we have learned from the lived experience that is seared into our souls and psyche? We are told over and over again, a commandment, a holy mitzvah that is repeated in the Torah more than any other, some thirty-six times, remember, you were strangers in the land of Egypt..., therefore, *you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the soul of the stranger because you were strangers in the land of Egypt/ki gerim he'yitem b'erezt mitzrayim* (Ex. 23:9). So too, on the day after Yom Hashoah, how to make real what we have learned, how to go on? In every generation, it is the same teaching, the same reminder, for you were strangers in the lands of Germany.

It is the week of *Parashat Sh'mini*, a Torah portion that teaches both the danger and the power of silence. After the sudden death of his two sons, Aaron, grief stricken, stands nobly before Moses' puny efforts to explain, as though to give purpose to tragedy in the moment of raw grief. The Torah says so simply, *va'yidom Aharon/and Aaron was silent*. In this portion we come to the very middle of the Torah in words. We are told that the middle is the words, *darosh | | darash, and he surely searched*. Two words cannot be the middle, but rather the silent

space between them, the womb of our seeking, the silent space from which our voice rises strong and true, knowing what we must say.

Elie Wiesel, *alav ha'shalom/peace be upon him*, (so strange to say, his absence in person made real), warned against the silence of indifference. It is Aaron's silence that we are to hear within and make our own, the noble silence of moral response, not of merely of indictment, but of challenge. In the power of that silence, embedded in the very womb of Torah, we hear the challenge, remember that you were strangers in the land of Egypt, in the lands of Germany, do not oppress the stranger.

We hear their silent voices and see the haunted eyes of children, of handprints and butterfly wings. I share from last summer's Journey of Remembrance and Hope, a journey to Germany of twelve rabbis, sharing here from our visit to a refugee center:

*With images seared into our consciousness of Jews desperately seeking refuge from the deadly reach of this land of our journey, we visited the refugee center in Reinickendorf on the outskirts of Berlin. In 2015, Germany accepted more than a million refugees. Sitting in a circle around a large table, we listened to one of those refugees, recently arrived with his wife and three children from Aleppo. On the table before us were children's drawings of welcome, a bright yellow smiling sun, colors unbound flowing freely into each other, a butterfly formed by paint prints of a child's hands. I thought of a child's poem from Tereisenstadt, "I Never Saw Another Butterfly." Mr. Masri told of the harrowing journey, of crossing a sea that didn't part, of border crossings, arrests and beatings. Speaking in Arabic that was translated into German that was translated into English, a group of American rabbis was joined with a Syrian Muslim man heart to heart by a common language of soul and psyche.*

And as a prayer for children, that on this Yom Hashoah we dare to look into their eyes, I share the poem of Pavel Friedman, who died in Auschwitz on September 29, 1944.

*The last, the very last,  
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow. Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing against a white stone...  
Such, such a yellow  
Is carried lightly 'way up high.  
It went away I'm sure because it wished to kiss the world goodbye.  
For seven weeks I've lived in here, Penned up inside this ghetto  
But I have found my people here. The dandelions call to me  
And the white chestnut candles in the court. Only I never saw another butterfly.  
That butterfly was the last one. Butterflies don't live in here, In the ghetto.*

May we remember and make their memories a blessing, seeing the need for Exodus today and doing our part to make it happen.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Victor