

Dear Chavraya,

There are times when we are reminded of our vulnerability. In all the ways of our being human, reminders come unbidden. There are times when as individuals we are reminded of the vulnerability of our bodies, so frail, fragile, and magnificent. And at times we are reminded of the vulnerability of our souls, touched by sorrow and heartache, of loss and loneliness, inevitable in the way and condition of being human, but nevertheless..., God protect us. As people in this world, in the face of so much danger, the vulnerability of the planet itself reflects and is one with the vulnerability of our own bodies, reminding us that we are one with Earth's fate. As a reality of the human condition, vulnerability can become its own source of strength in joining us to all others who are human, reminding that we are all at times called to comfort and at times to be comforted. The experience of our own vulnerability can remind us of human equality, that we all really are one in the ever so fragile human reflection of God's image.

All of this has swirled within me this week, perhaps among all of us in the way of our own feeling and experiencing our vulnerability as Jews. Even as we reach out to offer support to others who are so much more immediately vulnerable, we have been reminded, touched deeply with the reality that we are all one, waiting and wondering, and not waiting, acting for the sake of each other, Jews helping Muslims, Muslims helping Jews, all of us seeking sanctuary for immigrants. We feel shaken, we cry, we stumble, feeling the ache in our hearts, and we allow ourselves to be embraced even as we embrace others. It is the strength that comes of vulnerability. In bomb threats to Jewish schools and community centers, in attacks that desecrated Jewish cemeteries, we feel our vulnerability. Attacks on schools and cemeteries are an attack on the living and the dead, on the past and the future. An attack on a cemetery is itself an attack on the living and the dead, on the ever so vulnerable who are resident there, and on those who come to visit, to affirm connection, to find peace in the shelter and sanctuary of the dead.

In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat T'rumah*, we are told, *asu li mikdash v'shochanti b'tocham/make for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them*. I have thought so much about this verse this week, of mitzvah and memory, of what it means to fulfill the mitzvah in these days, in our time and in these very days, to make a sanctuary that God might dwell among us. Of physical and spiritual sanctuaries, a cemetery is both, so much both, holy ground, foundation of our being, place of rest and renewal, the earth from which we come and to which we return, so physical. In that very physical essence is the mystery of all life, of who we are as human beings, awareness of time and timelessness, cycles of life and time turning, the spiritual held in the physical, the physical in the spiritual, seamless fabric of life, wholeness.

In our own cemeteries we discover who we are as Jews, past and future joined in the present moment, in every visit, in every tear shed and stone placed upon a stone, in the reading of Hebrew names, of Hebrew dates, of Hebrew prayers, the telling of generations in the way of Hebrew names, of who we are and from whom we have come, a record in stone. New Jewish communities have historically formed a cemetery before building a synagogue, a sanctuary where the dead sleep with their ancestors, where the living commune with the dead,

conversations continued in another key. A Jewish cemetery is called a *Bayt Olam/Eternal House*, a place that is meant to be forever, that includes all of us. Of a sanctuary once built, as we are told to build it in this week's portion, continued now in spirit, from stone to flesh, each person is a sanctuary. The Holy Temple that stood in Jerusalem, the *Bays Ha'Mikdosh*, is referred to as the *Bayt Olamim*, a plural form of *Bayt Olam*. The desecration of a cemetery is an attack on God's house in all of its forms, on the living and the dead, *Bayt Olam*, a sanctuary in time and space, eternal. Affirming the continuity of life, at the bottom of a *matzeyva/grave stone* letters are written to represent words of prayer, *t'hey nishmato tz'rurah bitzror ha'chayim/may their soul be bound up in the bonds of life*.

Memory is the key to Jewish survival, to the unfolding of generations, the transmission of identity. An attack on a Jewish cemetery is an attack on memory, an attempt to eradicate memory and sunder our link to the past and therefore to the future. The image of stones toppled, of graves disturbed becomes personal. We feel the pain of those directly touched, imagining our own loved ones' graves, feeling the horror of what if. When haters and oppressors have wanted to attack living Jews, they have often attacked our dead, removing and desecrating stones, seeking to shatter continuity.

When hate is given license, all become vulnerable. When Muslims are attacked, and when immigrants are attacked, so will Jews be attacked, as we are witnessing, and so too will LGBTQ people be attacked, transgender among the most vulnerable. The Nazis used different color stars for different victims, even as Jews became the face of genocide.

In our vulnerability, we are joined one to another. As hate knows no boundaries, neither does love.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor