

Dear Chavraya,

The sound of an angelic voice filled the grand space, wafting through the open door of the meeting room in which we sat. We lifted our heads, our hearts, turning our ears to listen, pausing even as we tried to begin the meeting. Our work seemed blessed at the outset, a meeting of Jews and Muslims at the ISBCC, the great mosque in Roxbury. I was touched so deeply, feeling tears welling, as I finally asked our Muslim colleagues what we were hearing. One smiled and said with pride that it was the voice of a child learning to chant Quran. It was a special day for parents and visitors to come and witness their children's learning. It was breathtaking, filling me with hope. Words of the rabbis came to me, sharing them at the table: *the world is sustained through the sounds of little children learning in their teacher's house/olam mitkayem b'hevel pihem shel tinokot shel beit raban.*

That night, meeting in the shtibl with the families of *Mishpacha*, our child-parent Hebrew school, we engaged in deep discussion about what it means to be responsible for the world. We had been learning a *midrash* in which God takes the first human for a walk in the garden to behold its beauty, and then warns, "do not damage or destroy my world, for if you do no one will be able to repair it after you." Discussing what the *midrash* is teaching, one young child shyly explained that this is about generations, pausing to explain what generations are, and that each one in its time is responsible to be sure the world is still beautiful for the next generation. So the world is sustained by the sounds of little children learning.

And it is Anita's Bas Mitzvah, a child on the cusp of adulthood in the way that we honor our children and seek their presence as part of the Jewish community. Anita is the first of our community's children to come through all of our own learning programs, even as new little ones gather on the carpets to discuss *midrash* and what it means to be responsible for the world. Through the sounds of their voices, the world is sustained.

In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Vayigash*, after revealing himself to his brothers, Yosef sends them back to the land of Canaan to get their families and their father, Jacob. Returning then to Egypt, where there is food with which to survive the famine that is throughout the region, Jacob sends Yehuda ahead so that Yosef might direct him to the land of Goshen, where the family will dwell. Of Yehuda's need for direction, the Torah says *l'horot l'fanav Goshna/to direct him to Goshen*. The word *l'horot/to direct, to guide to instruct, to teach* is the word from which Torah comes, the teaching that is the soil and seedbed of who we are as a people. From this, the rabbis teach that Yehuda was going ahead to establish a school in Goshen, a place from which would go forth teaching.

Meaning to send toward a mark, as an arrow, *l'horot* is also the root of *morah/moreh*, a teacher, and so too of *horim/parents*. Whether in the mosque on that day of pure voices rising on holy words of Quran, or among the young voices sharing their wisdom in our shtibl, the *tinokot shel beit raban*, or a child chanting Torah on the cusp of a new age and stage, hope is given to all of us and the world is sustained.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor