

Dear Chavraya,

The Shabbos before Purim, it is *Shabbat Zachor/Shabbos of Remembering*. It is a Shabbos for holding contradictions, as with Purim, as with life, all the wholeness and brokenness in the world and in ourselves. As I write *remembering*, something calls out to see it differently, the word, reality, to take all the contradictions and weave them together, to “re-member” the body of humanity, to make whole again. On this Shabbos we chant a special *maftir/concluding* portion, reading from a second Torah (Deuteronomy, 25:17-19), *Zachor et asher asah l'cha Amalek/Remember what Amalek did to you....* Amalek attacked us at our weakest, the stragglers as we left Egypt, the young, the old, the infirm. He comes to epitomize evil, his name to be both remembered and blotted out, *you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under the heaven, do not forget/timcheh zecheh Amalek..., lo tishkach*. An ancestor of Haman, so we carry the contradiction to remembering Haman and calling out his name as we chant the Megillah, and then we make noise, swirling the graggers and stomping our feet, blotting out, forgetting in order to remember. Holding both, evil and its absence, we strive toward remembering, holding both and in that finding wholeness.

Of brokenness and wholeness, in the world and within ourselves, tension in juxtaposition with Purim, yesterday was the seventh of Adar (second Adar this year), the traditional date of Moses' *yahrzeit*. As marked by our Community Chevra Kaddisha, it is a day of remembering marked throughout the Jewish world by those who lovingly care for the dead. Joy and sadness mingle as familiar friends, if begrudging, in their forced acquaintance in the way of life. Knowing full well the mourning to come in remembering Moses just a week after the emerging crescent moon of Adar, the rabbis taught, *Mishe'nichnas Adar marbim b'simcha/whoever welcomes Adar increases joy*. The seventh of Adar itself holds the entire span of life, the ultimate tension within which we live, our journeys unfolding between the poles of life and death, book ends that contain all within, the story of our lives as written each day. In tractate Megillah (13b), the Talmudic tractate on Purim, the rabbis teach that the seventh of Adar is not only Moses' *yahrzeit*, but his birthday, as well. In a single day, all is contained and re-membered.

It is the way in each of our lives, as it was for Moses, as it is in the turning of the world and time, joy and sorrow, good and evil, birth and death, brokenness and wholeness. Choosing life, we have no choice but to hold it all, striving to make whole, to re-member. It is all reflected in Moses' life, and so in ours, all of the contradictions that we hold. Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses our teacher, beloved of the people, prophet of God, liberator and judge. For all of his accomplishment, how he must have cried bitter tears in the recesses of heart and home for his failure as a husband and father, so absent from those to whom he was closest. How in all his humility, moments of anger and insensitivity must have weighed upon him, carried to the grave on the seventh day of Adar. It is the way of being human, striving ever toward a wholeness that includes the brokenness of our lives.

In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Vayikra*, the beginning of the third book of Torah, *Sefer Vayikra*, a simple teaching of wholeness is held in the first word. It is a teaching in one small letter, the last letter of the first word, life in its beginning

and ending. The first word is the word *Vayikra*, whose last letter is *aleph*. In the Torah scroll itself, that last letter *aleph* is here written ever so small, so tiny compared to the other letters. In its small stature are teachings of wholeness and brokenness. It teaches of Moses' humility. God called directly to Moses, *VAYIKRa el Moshe/God called to Moshe*. In that direct address, unlike to anyone else, Moshe was embarrassed and did not want to be highlighted. Protesting to God, the Holy One told Moses to write of his being called. Not to disobey, Moses wrote as God commanded, but to affirm his own feeling of being yet as one of the people, he wrote the last letter so small, as though not even there. As humility meant to affirm equality, an expression of wholeness among people, so the little *aleph* comes also to reflect the brokenness of Moses' spirit. With the end of the book of *Sh'mot/Exodus*, Moses was no longer able to enter the *Mishkan* at will, the role of High Priest now given to his brother Aharon. Perhaps yearning for the solitude of the sanctuary, to serve in the way of spirit rather than of politics and prophecy, Moses was bereft. In God's calling to him, there is a voice of comfort, "I still love you, Moshe, I am still here for you in all that you do, in your brokenness as in your wholeness."

In this month of contradictions, of mourning and madness, on this Shabbos of "re-mem-bering," may we each hear God calling to us, and for all of our own interwoven contradictions be affirmed in the essence of our wholeness.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor