

Dear Chavraya,

Trekking through the desert, mother, two children, and grandfather made their way together toward reunion with husband and father, son in law. Tzipporah and her father, Yitro, and her two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, were coming from Midian to be reunited with Moses. The Exodus had happened, free at last, free at last, bound for the Promised Land. For all of the challenges now to be faced along the way, no more fear of the lash, no more fear of separation or of deportation, none to be sent away as Tzipporah and the children had been. Moses had fled from Egypt to save his life, hunted by the thugs of state, a price on his head. Later, as her husband's mission unfolded, Tzipporah had returned with her children to her family, now rejoining her husband on the journey to freedom, the past an ever present backdrop and reminder.

It is our backdrop and reminder, always to remember that we were slaves in Egypt. It is perhaps an imperfect analogy, but uncertainty of place, not sure where we belong is real, part of our collective psyche as wanderers from place to place. Abraham is called *Avraham Ha'Ivri/Abraham the Hebrew*, though in its linguistic essence, *Abraham the wanderer*, from the root *avar/pass*, as in passing from one place to another in the way of nomads, as our ancestors were. Of who we are and of where we have been, the past held in the promise of the future, our whole story is contained in the names of the two children, the two sons of Tzipporah and Moshe. The names are given at the outset of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Yitro*, as Tzipporah makes her way, fulcrum of the generations, the way of immigrants, generations journeying together. The elder son is named Gershom, from *ger sham/a stranger there*, and so Moses says of himself, his own story held in his firstborn's name, *I have been a stranger in a foreign land/ger ha'yiti b'ereetz nochri'ya*. The name of the younger son is *Eli'ezer/God is my help*, as Moses says looking upon the little one, *For the God of my father was my Help/ki elo'hey avi b'ezri/and rescued me from the sword of Pharaoh*. The trials and tribulations are not forgotten by the parents, memories carried by the children, and in their very names, and so down to us, part of who we are. We are the children.

It was a deeply moving meeting last night as a good number of us came together to consider what it means to be a "sanctuary congregation." The names of children echoed, the ones who need us most, *we were strangers there*, indeed in so many places, and *God has been our help*, always aware, though, that God works through people. The Nehar Shalom Steering Committee had agreed in principle earlier in the week that we should pursue our calling, letting the river flow out and give comfort to others, *Nehar Shalom/River of Peace*. It would be up to us, though to make it happen, up to people stepping forward to do the work.

There was much information, conveyed through excellent presentation and facilitation by Rachie Lewis of the Jewish Community Relations Council. As we gather notes and documents, all will be shared among us, for those who were present and those who could not be there. As an interfaith endeavor of conscience, sanctuary clusters are formed in neighborhoods. Within each cluster, one congregation, a "level one" community, needs to be in a position to provide space for physical sanctuary. The other congregations in the cluster, such as we would be, are "level two" support congregations, providing for such needs as

logistical support, professional services, shopping, comfort and presence. As of now, the nearest level one congregation to us is in Dorchester, though there is exploration underway to locate one in JP.

The most moving part of the evening was a deeply personal sharing by two of our own members who are deeply vulnerable at this time, for whom "being a stranger there" is here and now. Their brave sharing added a deep dimension of reality, reminding us that immigration is not an abstract discussion of people "out there." As God has been our help, so shall we be their help, here for each other and for all others. There are no borders and boundaries in the desert sands of time and heart, compassion the star and compass to guide.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor