

Dear Chavraya,

I write to you from amidst the stress, the sorrow, and the pain that is palpable in Jerusalem now. There is also a vibrant spirit that seeks to transcend and look ahead. As the light softens toward Shabbos there is an intimation of peace, a reminder of what should be. It feels unseemly to think of being on vacation, eerie to walk down to a hotel shelter. The first sirens sounded in Jerusalem as we returned from a visit to the village of Neve Shalom / Whahat al-Salaam / Oasis of Peace, an intentional community of Arabs and Jews. I have spent much time talking with people across the political spectrum. I have spoken with peace and justice activists, people whose children are in the army, people who think I and others from abroad should keep our mouths shut, with Palestinians who are terrified of what will be, with Bedouin who fast during the day for Ramadan and have little after the fast with which to distinguish day from night. All are joined by a sense of despair. I ask them all, how do you hold all of the contradictions and tensions, where do you find hope?

We struggled so deeply today with whether to try to get to Ramallah as we had long planned to visit the aunt of a Palestinian friend from Boston. I desperately wanted to go, feeling an urgency to listen, to talk, to see. My head said not to go. My heart rebelled, not wanting fear to separate people from each other. We consulted many times, arranging for a Palestinian taxi driver to take us and bring us back. By late morning the plan was to go. A short time later, Laila called us back to say all of the check points into the West Bank had been closed, there was no way to come. I felt both crushed and relieved. Her next words comforted me, "at least fear didn't stop us."

The murder of innocents has unleashed a torrent of violence. The killing of Israeli and Palestinian children and the death of the peace process has brought us back to an all too familiar place. Fear and despair is palpable on all sides. More violence will not end the violence that threatens all of our children. It is beyond time to find another way.

In this brief time here, yesterday seems so long ago, a shimmering of time and distance. I made a pilgrimage of sorts to the Slonimer Yeshiva, the place where my beloved teacher, the Slonimer Rebbe taught. I finally found the yeshiva through a series of adventures. It is another world, entirely unto itself. I walked through a gate and into a courtyard. People stared at me. I explained to several my love of the Slonimer's Torah and my desire to see the place where he taught. Some students directed me to a door off the courtyard and invited me to enter and see the *heichal*, the great hall of learning. I awkwardly and boldly made my way. I came to the *heichal* and looked through the open door, feeling the pulsating passion that filled the air. I felt too awkward to enter. I took it all in, the place where the *Netivot Shalom* taught, the Slonimer's pen name meaning *Paths of Peace*. I felt his spirit, all the more amazed by the openness and sensitivity of his writings when I saw just how removed and set apart was this world in which he lived and taught. I went back out to the courtyard and opened a volume of the Slonimer's writings to learn a little by myself, there in the place of his Torah.

I studied from this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Pinchas*. Pinchas is a violent zealot who kills an Israelite man and a Midianite woman with his spear. The context is complicated, as is the context today. But such violence cannot be the way. The Slonimer writes in the way of both lament and hope, *she'ayn ha'olam mitnaheg, eleh b'shalom/the world cannot go on, except through peace*. His words offer the challenge that screams from the violence of the Torah portion and from the daily news, this is not the way to go on. Yet it is Pinchas to whom God gives a Covenant of Peace, *hi'n'ni noten lo et b'rity shalom/ behold I give to him My Covenant of Peace*. In the word *shalom* the letter *vav* is broken, cut right in two in the Torah scroll itself, the only place in the Torah where a *vav* is so written. The rabbis teach that the Covenant is not for now, offered in the moment as though to inspire Pinchas, all of us to strive toward greater wholeness. They write of the Covenant of Peace as given to Pinchas, *keshe hu shalem v'lo keshe hu chaser/when he is whole and not when he is deficient*.

That space in the broken *vav* is filled with our tears. As Shabbos comes now on the magical light of Jerusalem, may its hope touch our hearts and guide us all, Jew and Arab, toward another way. The Slonimer teaches on *Parashat Pinchas* that when we enter our homes on Shabbos we should sing out, *Shabbat Shalom u'm'vorach/A Shabbos of peace, may it be blessed*. So may it be.

Shabbat shalom u'm'vorach,  
Rabbi Victor