

Dear Chavraya,

I received a note this morning from a Muslim friend and colleague who shared with our Building Bridges through Learning group, of which she is a part, news of her mother's death. I was deeply touched by much that she shared, some reflecting the small details of a person's life, their beloved idiosyncrasies, the ways they guided us through the stages of our own lives, the nature of their day to day presence that gave structure and direction, their love that surrounded us and become as a sanctuary. I was especially touched by one thing that was shared about her mother, something that startled me, that jumped out as though through personal encounter with her mom. I always think about the relationship between our own lives, between my life, here in the present, and the future. Intrinsic to so much of my thinking and theology is that link between realms in time, as between the breath of creation itself and the fulfillment of all time, the breath of *Moshiach/Messiah*. The words of my friend's mother jumped out to me, suddenly giving me a new way of framing something so basic to my thinking, yet in a way I had never thought of before. It is truly an instance of a person's memory being a blessing. I share with you words from my friend's remembrance of her mom. I think you will see what jumped out for me, as it may for you as well:

She was stubbornly persistent and dedicated to the creative ideas Allah gave her...whether it be in refinishing (by hand) the entirety of our kitchen cabinets or establishing innovative institutions for Muslim Americans like the Stanford Islamic Sunday School, the Muslim Youth Camp of California, the Muslim Public Service Network. All of these have the mark of optimism, collaboration and authenticity because of her. If you ponder your 1-5 year professional & personal goals... or your 5-10 year goals, learn this from my mom: spend some time thinking about your 100 - 300 year goals. What are you dedicating yourself to that will last for generations to come...?

Yes, it is that piercing, jolting question of personal goals, not of our 1-5 year goals, nor even our 5-10 year goals, surely important in themselves, but our 100-300 year goals. Wow, what a question! It is not what we usually think about when we sit down to plan stages of our lives, well beyond even our longest term planning. My friend says it so clearly of her mother's accomplishments, that they have "the mark of optimism, collaboration, and authenticity." In that spirit, we are able to look to the future. These are enduring values that by their very nature will continue beyond our own presence in the midst of whatever it is for which we have given of ourselves. It is in our ability to look ahead, however hard the present, to be moved by a sense of optimism, which is also an expression of faith in what might be in spite of all. Collaboration is about building relationships for the sake of a greater good, the spirit that is felt in working together, in sharing a vision, enduring beyond the very people who are joined in a given moment in time. And when we work together with authenticity and integrity, when we are truly present and giving of the gifts that make us who we are, when we can receive with open hearts the gifts of others, then we have set a path to goals whose flowering shall be long beyond our time in this world of doing, and yet we are of that time as well. To the degree that we help to prepare the ground and set goals that are for the sake of others, others who shall be in days to come beyond our own, then we too are part

of that time.

I think of Choni the Circle Drawer, of whom the Talmud tells, who as an old man planted carob trees. Asked by a passerby why someone so old would plant carob trees that take so long to bear fruit, Choni answered, "as my ancestors planted for me, so shall I plant for my children." From teachings of a Muslim mother lovingly remembered by her daughter, so too the teaching of Choni is about our long term planning, not for ourselves, but for those who will come later. It is about the vision we have for the world and of how we set out on the path to the fulfillment of the vision, not for our own sake, but for those who will take up the way and continue toward that time to come. It is what we mean by *olam ha'ba/the world that is coming*. There is optimism in translating it this way, its literal meaning, rather than *the world to come*, as often translated. It is an expression of greater faith, faith that a better world and time is coming, that we will get there. As we set out our 100-300 year goals, so we help to bring that time and have a place in it when it does come.

It is the message of Shabbos, to live that future time now, for at least one day to live *as if* it already is that time, learning in the doing how to live to bring that time. So too it is the teaching of the *Mishkan/the desert sanctuary* whose building begins in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat T'rumah*. The Slonimer Rebbe points out with amazement that the commandment to build the sanctuary unfolds through five Torah portions, more ink on parchment, as it were, than any other *mitzvah*. The Rebbe asks why? He points out that the actual fulfillment of the commandment to build the *Mishkan* could only be fulfilled literally by the generation who did the building, the desert generation, and then later only by those who built the Temples in Jerusalem. The Slonimer then asks, as he is wont to do, *mah ha'nitzchi'ut/what is eternal*, what makes this a *mitzvah* for all time. Rashi speaks of building the sanctuary as being *l'dorot/for the generations*.

As the Slonimer teaches, on one hand it is for each of us to build a sanctuary within our own hearts, to create within ourselves a place in which God would want to dwell. It is a beautiful expression of encouragement to live in the way of holiness, of decency, of openness to the world, to others, to God. Also looking to the symbolic meaning of the *Mishkan*, the rabbis also saw in all the holy details of building the sanctuary, the details of our bodies, of each one's self, each person as a sanctuary. And they went further and taught that the sanctuary represented the world, the world in all of its beauty and possibility. As the details are set out for the building of the *Mishkan*, as it was to be physically in one moment in time, it is also teaching us of all that will be needed in the way of human connection if we would create the world to be as a holy sanctuary. As a mother gives shelter to her children in all the ways of day to day, as my friend so lovingly described of her mother, her mother's wisdom reminds us of what we need to do toward creating the world as sanctuary for all. As we read all of the details for building the *Mishkan* during these Torah portions, may we consider our role in its building. Toward the great flowering of the sanctuary that is the world, may we carefully consider our 100-300 year goals.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor

