

Dear Chavraya,

Of memory and mourning, of yearning and hope, the world and self, all the delicate strands of our selves and others, all interwoven in the web of life, each strand unique. We are the weavers, and each one a thread to be woven. How to weave, to show the brightness of our own strand in all its fragile beauty, and yet to make it one with all the other strands of the human family, each strand as beautiful, fragile, and unique?

It is hard at times to think in terms any more concrete than these. How can we imagine one strand of life, one thread in the human tapestry, one single person allowed to be abused and betrayed? How to hold so much suffering, but for place of birth and circumstance? It seems so simple, a human being is a human being is a human being.

There is a verse in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Balak*, that gives me pause. Resting within that place of pause, I try to hold as one two realities that touch me, reflecting on the web of all and my own place within it. Balak, the Moabite king, has called on the Moabite prophet Bilaam to curse Israel. Setting out to curse Israel three times, only blessings come forth from Bilaam's lips. As the king's demand to curse this people passing through his land grows more urgent, Bilaam offers words of insight about this people, our people. Meant neither as blessing nor curse, but simply as a reflection of what he sees, Bilaam says, *this is a people that will dwell apart/hen am l'vadad yish'kon/and not count itself among the nations/u'va'goyim lo yit'cha'shav* (Num. 23:9).

On one hand, the sense of isolation, of being a people apart is disturbing. On the other hand it can be a reflection of each person's and each people's need to turn at times within and both foster and draw from the wellsprings of its own identity. It can also be a turning aside from ways that are not right and good, of turning aside from the sword and violence, of bearing silent witness to another way. Dwelling apart needs for us to be a matter of degree, whether the turning away and dwelling apart is total or at needed intervals. To what degree do we separate, as in spiritual retreat, in order to be renewed, to be faithful to a particular strand in the grand beauty of the universal tapestry?

I feel this question as a sacred tension in two different contexts and realities this week. As part of the human family, caring for each and every member of the family, I want to respond to every hurt, feeling it as my own. I am drawn to be at the rally tomorrow, to join those who will be praying with their feet on the streets of Boston, walking as one to the Common for the sake of all. Beyond the practical realities of needing to insure that a place is held in shul for all whose paths tomorrow bring them seeking a place of prayer, it is also the way of my commitment to Shabbos. Stepping back, yet joined with all, I will be there in spirit with those who walk. I honor those who will be among the walkers in body as well as spirit, each of us holding a place for the other's presence.

In this time of Kaddish saying, having just begun the mourner's journey, I have felt the need to share something on the nature of my saying Kaddish, something that I look forward to sharing more fully along the way of this journey. As many

do, in most Kaddish sayings through the service I add words familiar to many in the last line of Kaddish. In our asking the Holy One who makes peace above to make peace *for us and for all Israel / alenu v'al kol yisra'el*, many add the words, *v'al kol yosh'vei tevel/and for all who dwell on earth*. As some may have noticed, I add these words for all of the various Kaddish sayings except for the Mourner's Kaddish. With the saying of the Mourner's Kaddish, I pause at that moment to give space for those wish to add the words of connection to all, waiting a moment and then saying the words of closing, *v'i'm'ru amen/and let us say amen*. The saying of the Mourner's Kaddish becomes a moment for me of turning within, as of holding space in shul while yet walking in spirit with those on the streets.

As I begin to say Kaddish for my father, I share a story that is part of the emotional context for the way of my saying Kaddish as a turning within. Tears come as I remember the first night of shiva for my mother twenty-three years ago. I was standing next to my father as we came to the saying of the Mourner's Kaddish for the first time. His Siddur was closed and his body bent, each of us crying. I held my Siddur open before him and said, "here, dad, we'll say it together." He quietly declined the book held open before him as he began to read from the tear-stained pages within, perhaps remembering his saying of Kaddish for his own father, who died soon after my dad's Bar Mitzvah. "I don't need it, I know the words," my father said as he quietly began, *Yisgadal v'yiskadash sh'mei rabboh....*" As I say Kaddish now for my father, I prefer to say it as he did for his father.

Joined with all, even when turning within, I find the bridge in the words of life-long import for me, words from this week's Haftorah as spoken by the prophet Micah, words that I chanted on my Bar Mitzvah: *higid l'acha adam mah tov u'ma ha'shem doresh mim'cha/it has been told to you, O mortal, what is good and what God seeks of you, only to do justly, to love lovingkindness, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).*

So may we walk with each other and with all, joined as one even when for but a moment dwelling apart.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor