

Dear Chavraya,

I am overwhelmed by the kindness, the streams of comfort that have ever so gently bathed us in this time surrounding my father's death. I am humbled by the merit of belonging to this community and of being so cared for. Last Shabbos, my dad having taken ill, I took a deep breath as our dear mourners rose to say Kaddish, wondering if in a week's time I would be among them. And so I am. I take my place as a mourner touched by all the streams of memory and of relationships that flow through the *shtibl*. We are joined as one in the sharing of memories and through the sacred words by which we honor the dead and affirm life.

The Torah portion that frames my dad's death is *Parashat Chukkat*. It begins with the enumeration of elaborate ritual details of re-entry following contact with death. Having given us a framework through which to feel the pain of death and then to go on, we are ready, whether in truth or not, to encounter the deaths of Miriam and then Aharon. And now among them in *Parashat Chukkat* is Aharon ben Avigdor v'Sarah, my father, Harold Reinstein. Going forward in the turning of Torah and time, I will read very differently two simple words in this *parsha*, lingering and holding them in a way I never have before, *va'ya'mot Aharon/and Aharon died* (Num. 20:28)

Parashat Chukkat is a Torah portion that I have come to love in recent years, and now even more. In the often subtle way of its emerging, the stream of the Torah's teaching of nonviolence wells up in the *parsha* to sooth and encourage. Of the desert journeys of Israel, a metaphor for the journeys of life, places are recounted, and rivers. In the way of mystery and mirage that beckons us to seek and search, the Torah then says, *Therefore it is said in the Book of the Wars of God: "Vahev in Sufah, and the streams that form the Arnon..."* (Num. 21:14). With a play on words the rabbis teach from this verse a way toward wholeness within ourselves and with each other. Their challenge to us is to stay engaged in the face of difference, to talk and debate until we come to a new place. *Vahev*, a place name, is read as *ahava/love*, and *b'sufah/in the Reed Sea*, is read as *b'sofah/in the end*. Of parents and children, teachers and students in strife, and so we can expand to all who encounter conflict, the rabbis teach, *they do not move from there until they come to love each other, as it is written, "Vahev in Sufa...; do not read b'sufah (in the Reed Sea or whirlwind), but rather, b'sofah/in the end -- (so there shall be ahava ba'sofah/love in the end...)* (Kiddushin 30b). So it has been for my father and I in overcoming the residue of pain left by his fierce temper in my early years, working together and loving, until in the end there has been only love.

I shared this teaching in Germany in an interfaith setting as part of the "Journey of Remembrance and Hope," of which I have spoken frequently. Having grown up in a home into which it was forbidden to bring German products, an avoidance and an antipathy which I inherited from my father, I felt I had to tell him of the journey, but waited until after returning. I had always known that I would go to Germany if it was for a greater purpose. As I described at the time, the moment of sitting with my then ninety-nine year old father and telling of that greater purpose and its journey was a gift. I share that moment now to honor him and his capacity for love that endures and allows for transcendence:

Upon returning, dad was aware that he hadn't seen me for some time and asked where I had been. As much as I had planned to avoid telling him, the words poured out. With eyes wide, at several points uttering the word "wow," dad listened as I told him in great detail of the Journey, of Ralf, the German Consul General who guided us, the sense of greater purpose, of the young people, of the memorials. Generations and guilt flowing together, dad asked with the intensity of a plea, "do they recognize what they did?" "Did you see signs of the Nazis?" I told him gently of Dachau, and we both cried. Dad leaned back and said with fervor, "I still couldn't go there." Taking a deep breath, and using language that is mine and not his, I said, "Dad, I need your blessing on my trip to Germany." Quietly pausing, clearly feeling the power of the moment, roles of father and son renewed as in days of old, he reached his arm out across the fraught silence to take my hand. Through tears, dad said to me, "I'm proud of you."

Also from *Parashat Chukkat*, a beautiful teaching emerges through the graceful teaching of the Torah T'mimah, Rabbi Baruch Ha'Levi Epstein, from just a few verses beyond our teaching of love's emergence in the end, *the essence is not to forget remembrance of the words/l'tachlis she'lo yishkach zichron ha'ma'marim.*

Va'ya'mot Aharon/and Aharon died. I shall not forget his words, and so he shall live, love surrounding. And for your love, thank you.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor