

Dear Chavraya,

After the rains fell so suddenly today and then the sun appeared, I quickly got up from my desk and went downstairs, opening the door and stepping outside. As I always do in such times of rain and sun in quick succession, I had come to search for a rainbow. A rainbow is a symbol of peace, of wholeness and harmony. The rabbis taught that the rainbow is the symbol of God's universal covenant with all of humanity, a promise not to again destroy the earth. In ancient times, an inverted bow was a sign of peace, a hope for reconciliation. As between heaven and earth, so the rainbow becomes our challenge to respond in kind to God's promise. The rainbow as our witness, we too are then to solemnly swear not to destroy this precious planet, that we too turn all weapons upside down and promise not to use them again.

Searching diligently, I did not see a rainbow this morning. Walking back up the front stairs, I could see the quizzical look on the housepainter's face. I explained that I had come to look for a rainbow, sharing my disappointment in not seeing one. The housepainter smiled and offered a beautiful teaching. He quietly said to me, as though to reassure, "somewhere there is a rainbow." It is such a deep and encouraging teaching, expanding the arc and embrace of the rainbow. Somewhere else, other people are looking up and seeing a rainbow and delighting in its magic and promise. God needs all of us to see a rainbow and be reminded of its promise and its challenge. Simply to see a rainbow softens the heart and opens our souls to greater embrace. The very presence of a rainbow is the beginning of its own promise fulfilled. Touched by wonder, how can we countenance the ways of damage and destruction?

With heart softened and soul opened, we are more able to ask of ourselves and of God, what do you seek of me, what shall I do, how shall I be in this world? It is a question in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Ekev*. Moses says to the people, *and now, O Israel, what does God your God require of you/mah ha'shem elokecha sho'el may'imach? Only to revere God, your God; to walk in all God's ways and to love God, and to serve God, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul...* (Deut. 10:12). Soon after, the Torah explains what it is to love God, to be as God, for God is one *who secures the rights of the orphan and the widow and loves the stranger, to give the stranger bread and clothing. You too shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt...* (Deut. 10:18-19). Love of God requires that we love people. That is what God seeks of us.

There is an immediate parallel between these words in our Torah portion and the words of the prophet Micah in the Haftorah for *Parashat Balak*. Micah also asks of what God wants and then tells us, *higid l'cha adam/it has been told to you, O mortal, mah tov u'mah ha'shem doresh mim'cha/what is good and what God seeks of you/ki im asot mishpat v'ahavat chesed v'hatzne'ah lechet im elokecha/only to do justly, to love lovingkindness, and to walk humbly with your God...* (Micah 6:8).

I feel a particular connection between the verses of God's seeking in *Parashat Ekev* and in Micah. *Ekev* is my birth portion, though my Bar Mitzvah was a few weeks earlier on the Shabbos of *Balak*. Ever since chanting the words of Micah as my Bar Mitzvah haftorah, they have remained as a compass in my life, as a rainbow

reminder of what God seeks in all the ways of my going. As I always like to share, when I spoke of Micah's words at my Bar Mitzvah, my mother, her memory be a blessing, asked me to add a few words to Micah's. Urged to walk humbly with God, so my mother asked me to say, "and with people." In *Parashat Ekev*, the portion of my birth, my mother's concern is given voice. If we would revere God and walk in God's ways, so we are to love the most vulnerable among us, to walk humbly with them as our way of walking humbly with God.

These two portions become as one to me, joined beneath a rainbow's arc, the Torah portion of my birth and the Torah portion of my Bar Mitzvah, *Ekev* and *Balak*. As the housepainter taught, "somewhere there is a rainbow." With that awareness, feeling the wonder as beheld through another's eyes, may our hearts be softened and our souls be opened, that we might walk humbly with God and with people.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor