

Dear Chavraya,

It was such a full week, intensely full with the swirl of life. It began for me in Washington with the JStreet conference, seeking sparks of hope amidst so much despair in the Middle East. I am not sure I found cause for hope, but yet we can't wait for cause, needing to hold on to hope lest we succumb to despair. We need to be the hope if we would be the change we wish to see. Much of the week turned around preparing emotionally and practically for yesterday's Children's March to Protect Immigrant Families at the State House. With children leading, the halls of state were filled with buoyant hope, even while pleading on behalf of many of their own families, the irrepressible spirit of children lifting up our own.

We came calling on the Governor to support legislation to help insure the safety and humanity of these most vulnerable among us who have come seeking safety. To bring the message home, an interfaith group of clergy, sat-in at the entrance to the Governor's office. It was a beautiful gathering of song and learning, of quiet and sound. We anticipated arrest, seeming imminent at one point, and then something shifted and there seemed to be no interest in arresting us. One of the officers began to sing along with us, "This Little Light of Mine." Perhaps that was the light, our own presence as a *shammas* kindling new light. Perhaps there was no need to be arrested in that time, in that space, the message brought home simply through our presence. It was important to me to acknowledge the distress caused to these officers, some of them clearly greatly distressed at the beginning. To acknowledge their distress while speaking of the so much greater distress caused to immigrant children and families who live in fear of deportation. When with pride and purpose we rose from the beautifully intricate marble floor, reading out our call to the Governor, we went downstairs to the Great Hall and held hands in a circle to offer prayer, reflection, and song. I felt tearful as we closed with "We Shall Overcome."

Turning to leave, one of the officers, the first one we had earlier encountered in front of the Governor's office, who had nervously called on his colleagues for help, approached me. I had hoped to find him before leaving and now he found me. Extending his hand, he said to my disbelieving ears, "it is terrible what is happening to the children, their families being torn apart." I suddenly realized that he was talking about the very immigrant children with whom and for whom we had gathered, for whom we called on the Governor to act. I realized then that our message had been heard, that a greater circle was forming, each of us as the *shammas*, no less urgency in the face of all there is to do, but glimmers of hope in this little light that needs each of us if we're gonna let it shine....

It has been a week of joy and sorrow among us, of birth and death, the full circle of life. As a community, we are here for each other, together forming the vessel in which to contain all the tears of joy and sorrow that fall from our many eyes. In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Tazria-M'tzora*, there is the span of life and death, sickness and health, all contained within one span of Torah. It is *Torat Chayyim/the Torah of Life*, and as life itself all is contained within in, all part of life, death too a part of life. The outset of the parsha is about birth, an expression of awe and wonder before the miracle and mystery of birth. Verses that can be challenging in telling of unequal times of separation for the mother, longer for a

daughter and shorter for a son, yet even here, as we look closely at sacred time to be apart, to focus on the bond with child, the weave of life itself emerges all the way back to the beginning.

The Karliner Rebbe responds to the awe of birth, the mystery of conception, the seed deposited in the womb, and he draws from the Book of Job (10:12), *chayyim v'chesed asita imadi/life and kindness you have done with me*. How else shall we respond to the miracle except with life and kindness, so modeling the way of God among people? And so the verse continues in Job, *and your providence watches over my spirit/u'f'ku'dat'cha shomrah ru'chi*. The Karliner makes a powerfully beautiful sweep to the very beginning, joining the human spirit with the breath of God, the gentle breath of God that hovered over the face of the waters, breathing new life into being, the birth of the world. What is this spirit of which Job speaks, asks the Karliner, if not the very spirit of God, *v'ru'ach elokim m'rachefet al p'nei ha'mayim/and the breath of God hovered over the face of the waters* (Gen. 1:2). From that verse that tells of creation beginning ever so gently there flows through Torah, as I read it, a stream of nonviolence, a reminder even amidst violence to come, that all is meant to be as it was at the beginning, life lived in worthy response to God's gentle breath.

And in the swirl of this week, the turning of life, the kindling of light, of hope, a week of children leading the way in their call for justice and compassion, this week of *Parashat Tazria* and the awe of birth, Mieke and I welcomed a new grandchild into our family. As we go to meet this precious new little one in the coming week, we bring to him the fullness of life, affirming the hope that shines so brightly from the soul of every child born. God's breath that is breathed so gently into every human being, into every creature, joins us all as one, each of us a strand in the delicate web of life. To every new strand, we sing out *l'chayyim / to life, amen v'amen*, welcome precious little one.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor