

Dear Chavraya,

Our eldest member died today, Mr. Sid Werlin, his memory be a blessing. I felt through the day an eerie resonance with my dad's death. Each of them died a few short weeks after their 101st birthday. One of my abiding memories of these two elders is of a Shabbos morning in the shtibl about four years ago. Both my dad and Mr. Werlin were in shul on that morning. Each of them, of course, would always receive an aliya when in shul, in their "ascent" so lifting us up with wonder. There was something truly awesome, indeed quite wondrous, as we heard each one's strong voice chanting words of blessing, voices so filled with purpose, with clear gratitude and amazement for the gift of still being able to stand there before the Torah. On that morning, with one of them standing on each side of the reading table, I paused between readings and asked that we all take in the gift of that moment for all of us. I noted that standing at the reading table there was almost two hundred years of life experience. It was a moment in which to consider the journey of life, life itself, and each of our own journeys through the days.

Mr. Werlin loved *Nehar Shalom*, often declaring with passion before leaving that "this is a House of God." He would write that in notes he would send and he would tell that to me when I would visit him over the years, referring to our simple shtibl as a "House of God." He delighted in our traditional ways of prayerful expression and yet in the facilitating of that expression by people of so many different ways of expressing their presence in the world. As we open the Torah tomorrow to the very beginning and behold the letter *bet* of *B'reishit*, I will think of Mr. Werlin. The name of the second letter, *bet*, is itself the word for house. Simply in opening the Torah on this Shabbos there is an opportunity in which to pause and reflect on what it means to be a "House of God."

In this week of *Parashat B'reishit*, the week in which Mr. Werlin died, the cycle of life is held before us in all of its fullness. On Simchas Torah just a few days ago, we completed the cycle of Torah. Without a moment's delay, we then returned to the beginning and began again. We had just cried on reading of Moses' death, then scrolling back through time, back to the beginning in order to read of the birth of this earth. We mourned and we celebrated, feeling awe for creation, even as we had been touched with awe for the fullness of Moses' life, holding in our hearts the full span of life.

The Torah itself teaches of the full circle of life. The very last letter of the Torah is the *lamed* of *Yisrael*. The very first letter of the Torah is the *bet*, as of house. When the Torah is circled around in one great cycle of life, the *lamed* joins the *bet* and in the joining of end and beginning the word *lev/heart* is formed.

May our hearts be filled with the love and closeness of the season through whose days we have journeyed together. May we fill our shtibl with that love of heart that makes us worthy of being a "House of God." In the joining of ends and beginnings, all as the journey of life, may Sid's memory be a blessing.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor