

Dear Chavraya,

When it feels too hard to write coherently, when thoughts are too unformed, too hard to string words together, I turn to prayer. Of even these words unformed, I share them with you simply as they have come at the end of this week that has been so hard for all of us. In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Chayei Sarah*, we are challenged to move from sorrow to joy, to embrace life in the face of death. The portion opens with Sarah's death and then moves toward the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca. We are left to wrestle with how to move from one to the other, with what it means to live in the tension between death and life in the living of life. In living life, allowing it to unfold in the face of death, so we honor those who have died, even those so cruelly torn from life. May we offer all that we carry in our hearts as offerings to the Holy One. May this Shabbos yet bring us one week closer to the day that is all Shabbos.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor

To Water with our Tears the Tree of Life
A Prayer for Pittsburgh, for the Country, for the World, for Ourselves

El Malei Rachamim, God full of compassion, help us to be with each other, for only with kindness shall we build a world of love. As You have taught through your psalmist, *olam chesed yibaneh / the world is founded on love*. How else can we be if we would make of their memories the blessings of their lives? It is what our children teach, "get rid of the bad by doing good, be nice to each other."

We turn to You on this first Shabbos after the slaughter in Pittsburgh, this Shabbos of eleven shivas pausing in public expression of grief, pausing to give the mourners silent space in which to grieve in ways the world cannot see, to imagine the ways of their dear ones' dying, to hold forever as Eliyahu's cup and chair their empty places at the Shabbos table. And we wonder if even last week's Shabbos counts in the world's ever turning closer to the day that is all Shabbos, when the whole world shall be filled with Shabbat shalom.

Remembering the turning of only one week's cycle, we remember all the way back as well, calling up all of what it has meant to be a Jew in the world and in time. With the gift of memory, we remember the pain as well as the beauty that comes with being who we are.

Collective memory is passed from one generation to the next, psychic scars so easily scratched. Of pogroms and ravines, of gas chambers and ovens, calls of "kike" to a child in the street, jokes about money and greed, tropes renewed of international conspiracies and control. Images are passed through oral telling and in remembrance books, through Torah itself, and through the mournful melodies and their litanies as sung on Yizkor days and Tisha B'Av.

Of slavery and exile, of destruction and degradation, You remind us over and over again in Your Holy Torah that we were slaves in Egypt, and therefore we know what it is like, and therefore we know the soul of the stranger, and therefore You have commanded us that we not mistreat the stranger, and the orphan and the widow, all of these and more who are the most vulnerable among us. Help us to be your worthy partners in continuing to build this world with love.

Help us to see what is different now, to see with open eyes and hearts all of your other children who surround us with love, not as when the pogroms came and the Sho'ah and we stood alone, but for the righteous few. Help us to see that we do not walk alone, that as we have walked with African Americans, and with Muslims, with immigrants, with all who are hunted and hounded and hated, they are walking now with us, singing our spirit home.

Help us to hold our own grief freely as your people Israel, You and we knowing that in turning inward we are not turning away from all the beloved of our extended human family. With a pain so sharp, uniquely felt, we imagine those who were enveloped in *talesim* on that Shabbos morning, as were we, those who prayed the same prayers that we prayed on that Shabbos morning. Unable to imagine how your holy ones were slaughtered by weapons of war in a house of God, your house, may the time soon come when the tools of violence and destruction shall not even be for war, when, as You have promised, every one shall sit beneath their vine and fig tree in peace and unafraid.

And when for now we are afraid, help us to nurture from our vulnerability a deeper sense of what it means to be secure; hope like tendrils rising through jagged cracks of heart and way, enough love emerging to hear and to hold the differences among as we wrestle with our insecurity, acknowledging before You that a uniform inspires confidence for some and trembling dread for others. As the place from which to begin and so to end, help us to be secure in your love and ours.

El Malei Rachamim, God full of compassion, words not of death but of life, help us to turn our fear to love, that hand in hand with each other and with You we shall create a world built on love as imagined from the beginning, a world without fear or violence or hate, the sun to shine for children everywhere upon a beautiful day in the neighborhood, for each of us to nurture and to love, to water with our tears the Tree of Life.