

Dear Chavraya,

It has been such a full week, with little time now as we approach Shabbos. It was a week of heartache and hope, a week of boundaries approached, navigated with faith, losing the way, seeking return. The week began with a tragic funeral, the death of a young person, joined to us through friends among us. There were efforts to bring comfort through presence in a church service, all the complexities of contemporary Jewish life, fraught with alienation and yearning.

Purim came in the midst of this week, the day that turns the world upside down. We are bidden by way of mitzvah to be happy in this month of Adar. It is hard to be happy on command, as it is to love on command, and yet we are told to do that too, "and you shall love God, your God..." "you shall love your neighbor as yourself..." Not only for Purim, but also for this whole month of Adar, even two months of Adar in this leap year, *mi'she'nichnas Adar marbim b'simcha/whoever welcomes the month of Adar increases joy*. It is surely a mitzvah to increase joy, sorely needed in our lives. So we dress up in costumes, turning the worlds of our lives upside down, letting go. It is hard to do, but helpful in its reminder not to take ourselves too seriously, to be able to step back from the serious, at least for a while, sometimes.

In the midst of joy and levity, sometimes the very humor that is meant to help us let go and step back itself causes hurt. The world becomes so upside down we can't tell which way is right side up. So we need to find our balance, to fix what is broken, to heal the hurt however it was caused. There are no excuses when people are hurt, only to say "I'm sorry," even when we are or were wearing funny clothes. There is so much goodness among us; we trust that we will find the way. It is not for naught that Yom Kippur is called *Yom k'Purim/the day that is like Purim*. And so too, Purim may sometimes take on the way of Yom Kippur, sated with homentaschen, yet needing to atone, seeking our way to wholeness.

The inverted world we seek is a world of wholeness, the opposite of the broken world in which we live. The world of today turned upside down, shaken around and come out right is one of justice, of peace, of understanding. People will still be hurt because people are still people, but we will know what to do to make things right, to reflect the wholeness that is all around and within each one.

That inverted world so different than today's world will be one without borders, without walls between us, without divides of our own making. Of boundaries meant to define each one's rightful place and to honor their person, we shall know how to behave with dignity, not to hurt, to insult or demean. It is the lesson we are left with as Purim fades into this year's memories, boundaries to encourage ways of respect, borders that divide us from each other to fade with the sunset of this very day as we approach Shabbos.

Today was *Shushan Purim*, the Purim of Shushan, and so by extension it becomes the Purim of cities that were walled cities long ago in the time of Shushan. Most of the Jewish world celebrates Purim on the fourteenth of Adar, while ancient walled cities in the Land of Israel celebrate on the fifteenth of Adar. In Tel Aviv,

for instance, Purim is on the fourteenth, while in Jerusalem it is on the fifteenth. The Torah itself plants a seed of irony. We learn later in Torah (Num. 13:18) through insightful commentary that walled cities are weak cities, that open cities are strong. It is a lesson yet to be learned, that walls are not the way of a nation that is secure in itself.

As we find Shabbos pause in the transition from week to week, I want to share with you that in the coming week I will be traveling with a clergy delegation through T'ruah, the rabbinic human rights organization, to the southern border. One of the leaders and coordinators of the delegation is our own dear Rabbi Salem Pearce. In the area of El Paso and Juarez, we will seek to witness and to bear witness to the plight of migrants on both sides of the border. I will share with you insights and emotions, asking now for your blessings upon this journey, feeling a welling of emotion and not a little trepidation.

In all the worlds in which we travel, we seek encouragement and strength from Torah, from God, from each other. That is the message of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Tzav* (Lev. 6:1-8:36). Rashi teaches that the word *tzav*, meaning *command*, the root of *mitzvah*, always comes as a word of encouragement, *lashon zeruz, mi'yad u'l'dorot/for now and for the generations*. Sometimes we need to be encouraged even to do a mitzvah. At the opening of the portion, encouragement is needed to make the nighttime offering, the *olah/ascent* offering. It is an offering from which there is no material benefit, no shared meal among family and friends, so the need to encourage its contribution. In its spiritual meaning is the encouragement that we need, as did our ancestors, and so through the generations. It is the offering that burns through the night, the fire of a new day to be kindled from its dying embers.

So may we be encouraged to make our way together through all the worlds, worlds of sorrow and joy, of heartache and hope, of humor and its hurts, worlds of brokenness and bravery, of borders and boundaries, respecting those that honor dignity and breaching those that keep us from each other. May it be a restful and renewing Shabbos, the glow of Purim undimmed in its hope for the inverted world soon to be, a world filled with Shabbos peace.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor