

Dear Chavraya,

So it is, held by all of us, another shooting, another explosion of hate, more people scarred in body and soul, more death. *After the Death*, that is the name of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Acharei Mot/After the Death, after the death of the two sons of Aaron/acharei mot sh'nei b'nei Aharon* (Lev. 16:1-18:30). The questions struggle to emerge from a disjointed verse, as though a voice struggling to speak through time and mist, not sure which questions to ask, so sudden, why now, why here? Why here to tell again of the death of these two, Nadav and Avihu, so suddenly wrenched from life, the words set in indeterminate time, simply after their death, and then repeating as though to bring home, *va'ya'mutu/and they died*. We are left to struggle, to wonder, to ask, to weep. Why? Why did they die?

After the death, after the death of Lori Gilbert-Kaye, we are left to struggle, to wonder, to ask, to weep. Why? Why did she die? After a death, we struggle, we ask, we try to make sense, even when there is no sense to be made. At a sorrowful gathering last Sunday afternoon at the New England Holocaust Memorial, we learned of this woman's righteousness, of her selflessness, of her courage. We heard recounted the ways in which she gave so much of herself, of her love for her community, Chabad of Poway, California, of her love for her family, for her people. We heard of how just a week before Pesach she had danced at the wedding of her rabbi's daughter. We heard strands that tell of how she had saved her rabbi's life, taking bullets that would have found their way to him.

I wanted to be at that gathering of remembrance. I wanted to insure that those of Lori's own extended community of Lubavitch Chasidim didn't stand there alone. I wanted to help make clear for ourselves and for others that we stand together as Jews at times like this, that labels fade, that we are one. In the face of death, we are Jews joined together, however much at odds we may be with each other in life. *After the death* of Lori Gilbert-Kaye I found myself probing the challenge, struggling with the question of how to be one in life. Perhaps that we so easily come together at times of tragedy reminds us that we are indeed joined with each other in life. The heart-rending chant of *Kel Molei Rachamim* at the memorial told of how we are joined. The past from which the prayer's words and tune emerge tell of our people's story. We are joined by shared stories and timeless experience, by a shared calendar and by the shared holy days of which it tells, by a shared Torah and its journey through time toward a better time.

And how different we are. *After the death* of Lori, I read more about her. For all that joins us, there would be in life a chasm of difference. She was an ardent Trump supporter, toasting his campaign, toasting his presidency. I wondered what we might have said had there been opportunity in life to speak with each other, to learn more of each other's story, to learn of her in her own words. I wondered if we could have explored the divide between us and sought out the why of our differences? Perhaps, might we have found that it is not so deep and jagged as it appears? I wondered if we could have probed why we hear so differently the lessons that we draw from the same Torah, from the same words of prayer, from the same stories, from the same history that make us who we are as Jews.

After the death of Lori, the questions remain, waiting to be explored with others, the living, if we would have the courage and the will. It may be easier for some of us to identify with those who died at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. And it may be easier for others among us to identify with Lori and those wounded at Chabad of Poway. However much there may be more immediate familiarity with those like our selves, it is seductively dangerous to so identify, whether in regard to our extended Jewish family or our extended human family. More than the breadth of a nation's expanse lies between Pittsburgh and Poway. Joined by another's hate, the challenge remains for us to be joined to each other by our own acts of love.

After the death, as now after Lori's death, we can sometimes learn from others the way of love that we need to nurture among ourselves. Fear of the other has motivated so much of our own inward turning, turning away from others, even, God forbid, the hardening of our own hearts to others. We struggle to understand to what degree our own Jewish fears can allow even one of such a good soul as Lori to support such hateful policies that deny the humanity of others. Learning the way of love from loving neighbors, I share with you words of comfort that came from two friends this week.

First, I share the words of Mohamed, a Muslim friend, and then the words of Sister Tess, a Catholic nun.

From Mohamed:

I just wanted to express my solidarity and my love to you all and to the Jewish community at large in these tumultuous times. You are in my thoughts and prayers as I sit here in Casablanca having breakfast in the very Jewish neighborhood where I grew up.

Shalom!!! Mohamed

From Sister Tess:

Dear sisters and brothers,
My heart weeps with you and your sisters and brothers at Chabad of Poway, California, and the entire Jewish community. Just want you to know that I have been praying with you throughout Passover, and feel with you at this tragedy on last day of Passover & on another Shabbat. I will light a candle at my parish this morning, and pray with and for you at Sunday liturgy. We stand together in solidarity and faith.

Shalom.

With love, Tess

So may we see each other, as Jews, as human beings, each one in God's image, learning *after the death* the way of life.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor