

Dear Chavraya,

I have found it difficult to hold and behold the light that has shined through this week of Chanukkah. It has felt dimmed for two deaths that have touched me in the turning from last Shabbos until this Shabbos. I have looked to the gently dancing flames that in our menorahs draw from both oil and wax. From wicks in oil, I think of soul light, especially of souls that have been, as from the Book of Proverbs we learn, *ner ha'shem nishmat adam/God's candle is the human soul*. I feel comforted by each little flame's selfless dance of hope, unassuming, each one seeming brighter in the presence of its friend and neighbor as the nights unfold. At times, I have seen each flame as that of a *yahrzeit* candle, a flame of remembrance.

The two deaths that have touched me would seem unrelated, one of a person well known to me, one of someone long held in my heart as a source of inspiration. One died last Friday in the approach to Shabbos. The other died long ago, in a Nazi prison in 1943. As impossibly different as their situations were, each of them is held in my heart, each of them tormented in different realms of the crucible of hate whose demonic fires were neither gentle nor dancing, the devil's candle in the world that would destroy the human soul.

Jannushka was a child survivor. That reality defined her life, at least its contours, sometimes more the child, sometimes more the survivor. Born of Polish Jewish parents who had made their way to France, Jannushka was born in Paris. A five-year old when the Germans invaded, she was shuttled about among various "safe" houses. She was taken under the wing of partisans, each one who cared for her disappearing, betrayed, the young child being told when each had been shot. Throughout her life she sought to reweave those severed links of loving connection and protection. I came to know Jannushka when she came to the synagogue in Victoria, B.C. with her two young children. Over time, with encouragement from me and from others, she began to "come out" as a survivor. About ten years ago, we reconnected and began corresponding, exchanging emails about once a month. Her letters were often very long, late night torrents of feelings, outpourings of fear, loneliness, struggles to make sense of what had happened so long ago, to hold onto meaning, to keep going. Now in her eighties, she would often still be that little girl in Paris when it was a city without light.

Last Saturday evening, *motza'ei Shabbos*, when I went to my computer after Shabbos had ended, there was one more email from Jannushka. A notice of Jannushka's death, it had been sent by her daughter. Attached was a memoir that Jannushka had written with a professional writer, almost two hundred pages just completed, a telling of her life. She tells of the years that she lived in Victoria and of the encouragement we gave her to live and tell her story. She tells of how she began slowly to go to schools and to speak with students about the Holocaust, of how she shared in the synagogue, of how she began to find a Jewish path so many years after it had been taken away from her. She tells of words that I spoke to her, words that I don't remember saying, but for their spirit, telling her that she is precious, needed, and cherished. And so her memoir ends: "I am Jannushka Elisheva Jakoubovitch, Juif, Witness. I remember. I tell that it has

happened. I am Jannushka Elisheva Jakoubovitch. Juif. Precious, needed, and cherished."

The other death that touched me this week is that of Franz Jagerstatter, whose life and death forms the gripping moral tale in the recently released movie, "A Hidden Life." A resister to Hitler's (*y'mach sh'mo/his name be blotted out*) draft, Franz became for me and to others an inspiration in seeking the path of resistance to the Vietnam era draft. I first encountered his story in 1969 through a biography by Gordon Zahn called "In Solitary Witness." Having seen the movie this week he is much on mind, his story held in the gentle flickering of the Chanukkah candles, the light of his soul continuing to be a blessing.

As this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Miketz* (Gen. 41:1-44:17), begins Yosef remains in prison in Egypt. As though shining a light of hope into all the prisons and all the places of hate, midrash draws on the Book of Job, *ketz sam la'choshech/put an end to the darkness* (Job 28:3). It is not a calling out to God, but to people. The verses tell of miners going down into the depths of the mine. So for us, we are to be the bearers of light wherever we go. The *Haftorah* chanted tomorrow from the prophet Zecharia for the Shabbos of Chanukkah tells of the way, '*not by military force and not by physical strength, but by My spirit,*' says the God of multitudes (Zecharia 4:6). As we kindle the Chanukkah candles and the Shabbos candles, even if their flames may seem at times like the flames of *yahrzeit* candles, they are beautiful in their gentle dancing. Tonight also begins Rosh Chodesh, a new cycle of the moon when the moon is not yet visible, only the light of our candles to illumine the beautiful stillness of night. We pause and we behold and we remember the soul light of which the candles tell, God's candles in the world; the light of those that are and of those that have been, each one precious, needed, and cherished.

Happy Chanukkah and Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Victor