

Dear Chavraya,

The year of saying Kaddish for my father has ended. I am finding it hard to leave the embrace of the mourner's circle. I am finding it hard to leave the comfort of rising amidst community, of hearing *amen* to the holy words of Kaddish that affirm life in the face of death. As I have often discussed with other mourners at the end of the sacred cycle, I try now to take to heart what I have learned and apply it to myself. It can be hard to move forward, and that is the very wisdom of our tradition and its emphasis on life, reminding us that to every thing there is a season, a time now to move on when otherwise we might not. In saying Kaddish we remain closer to the time when our loved one died, still held in the daily acknowledgement that they are no longer among us. Then the tradition gives us a little nudge and says it is time to go on. We carry with us the abiding support that has surrounded us, the memories that have come on wings of ancient words, and we go forth to make our loved one's memory a blessing in the world.

When my mother died, the journey to her dying and the way that opened from *Shiva* onward felt framed for me by three portions of Torah that remain for me as one unit, an expression of her teaching. She died in the week of the Torah portion *Acharei Mot*, which means *after the death*. It was her way of saying at the very outset of the journey, hers and mine, to look ahead, to look beyond death. Looking beyond pointed to the week of Torah portion *K'doshim*, the portion that framed her funeral and the week of *Shiva*. *K'doshim/holy, K'doshim ti'hi'yu/be holy*, that is to be our way of life, to be holy as God is holy. So we are guided by the mitzvot that follow, so many of which are meant to inculcate compassion and justice in the way of our relations with other people, and so with God. That is what it means to go forward, to engage with life and people, to be holy, to be a blessing, to weave the blessing of the loved one's memory into the fabric of our lives.

The third Torah portion of the unit that frames my mother's death and set me on the mourner's journey is this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Emor*. It opens with instructions to guide the *kohanim* in their own way of encounters with death. The ordinary *kohanim* are only to engage directly with the needs of the dead and to show outward signs of mourning when it is for immediate relatives, or for a *met mitzvah*, a person who has died with no one else to care for them. Alas, for the *Kohen Gadol* there was to be no outward sign of mourning and no involvement in caring for the dead, not even for those of closest family. *Parashat Emor* was the Torah portion that framed the week of my return to my community in Victoria, British Columbia. I returned to officiate at a tragic funeral of a young person the very next day. My own mourning had to be held in abeyance. However much I cried within, my outward expression of grief, genuine in itself, was for the young husband and father whom I was called home to bury, his family to comfort.

There are times when we are all as the *Kohen Gadol*, called to see our own lives as larger than ourselves, our own tears as part of a great well of tears, our own mortality as part of the web of life that in our days on earth we help to weave. In regard to the *Kohen Gadol*, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch offers words of comfort that in the weave of time are meant for us as well as for the "first servant" of the

sanctuary: *The ideal of the nation does not know death, 'the community never dies,' and under this concept of the 'eternal whole,' every individual who is part of the community and has lived for the community has a share in this immortality even here below. With every pure fiber of "his" life on earth lived in faithfulness... "he" will remain interwoven forever with the eternal essence of the community, and the impact of "his" own personal nobility will make him immortal on earth even after the physical shell in which "he" visibly walked among "his" people has become dust....*

As I hear my father softly chanting the blessing following the reading of the Torah, as he often did among us not so long ago, I hear in the tearful cadence of his voice the essence of Rabbi Hirsch's teaching in the ancient words, *chayyei olam natah b'tochenu/you have planted within us eternal life*. To the degree that we participate in bringing the better world, the day that is all Shabbos, so we have a place in its celebration. As we are told to be *of the students of Aharon, seeking peace and pursuing peace*, so we honor the first *Kohen Gadol*, making his memory a blessing. As I complete the Kaddish saying for my father, Aharon, so shall I go on, striving to make of his memory a blessing, seeking peace and pursuing peace. So together, making the memories of all of our loved ones a blessing, may we bring the day that is all Shabbos, *yom she'kulo Shabbat*.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor