

Dear Chavraya,

Once, many years ago, having just begun rabbinical school in New York, I was traveling with my Uncle Benny on the elevated train from Manhattan into Brooklyn. As the "El" hurtled along, I shared with him the difficulty that I was experiencing in beginning this new stage in my life. Shouting ever so gently, if you will, above the sound of steel on steel, the squeal and rumble of the train, Uncle Benny shared with me a teaching of the rabbis that I continue to hear in his own voice whenever I encounter the challenge of new beginnings. With all the warmth of his Yiddish, he said to me, "Vicky, *kol hatcholos koshos*," all beginnings are difficult.

Beginnings can be difficult, but as a friend once countered, they can also be sweet. With the magical and exhausting cycle of holydays that fill the month of *Tishrei* just behind us, we have arrived truly at the beginning. This is the first Shabbos of the year that comes in the ordinary holiness of time. It is the first Shabbos in the new year's Torah reading cycle, the Shabbos of *Parashat B'reishit/Genesis*. The whole year is before us, all of its possibilities, all of its unknowns, the difficulties and the sweetness, the challenges and the opportunities. Arriving at the very beginning of the Torah, I am filled with excitement, touched by a spiritual giddiness, suffused by the beauty of the Torah's opening verses. Part of me wants to linger with *B'reishit*, to remain at the beginning for a while, to savor the telling of Creation's miracle, to hold the innocence of Eden for just a while longer. The path opens before us, though, in Torah as in life, and we take the first hopeful steps forward.

The very first word of the Torah is an invitation to enter, to begin, to embrace possibility. The usual translation, *In the beginning God created*, obscures the depth of beauty and mystery of which we are a part. *B'reishit* literally means *In the beginning of...*, a construct form, grammatically unusual because it has no object, *in the beginning of what?* We can imagine an ellipsis, three dots following the first word of Torah. There is an open question; the way ahead is unknown, but filled with possibility. The first letter of Torah, *bet*, the letter of *b'racha/blessing*, opens to the left, offering its flow to all that shall come to be.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov offers a beautiful teaching on beginnings, one that offers sweet encouragement to transcend the difficulties that come with beginnings, a teaching that speaks to me of *Nehar Shalom* and of each of us: *Surely, at the beginning of the going one is not able to make a strong and sure way, rather it is yet a delicate path on which to tread.... But when a person makes some new way..., even though at the beginning it is but a delicate path, the Holy Blessed One will make of one's footsteps a strong and sure way....*

Touched by the beauty of Creation's promise on this Shabbos of beginnings, may our steps become sure and strong through each other's presence on the delicate path of possibility.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor