

Dear Chavraya,

Last night Mieke and I watched a deeply moving film, "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly." It is a French film about a relatively young man who suffered a debilitating stroke and is left paralyzed, but for the ability to move one eyelid. "Locked in," as his condition is called, his mind intact, he is submerged within his body like a deep-sea diver inert in a diving bell, tethered by hoses to the care of those on the surface. Through the love and compassion of his caregivers, the man comes to be able to communicate by blinking his one eye in response to the saying of the alphabet by others, until he blinks out enough letters to form a word, and then a sentence, and then a paragraph, and ultimately a book upon which the film is based. Rising from despair, his spirit soars like a butterfly.

To soar above despair is very much the theme of teachings by Rebbe Nachman of Breslov that some of us have been learning together for the past month. With beautiful imagery, Rebbe Nachman offers prayer as one of the ways to open a path out of despair. As though in a garden gathering flowers one at a time, we pray with single letters at first, finding the courage to utter but one syllable, and then we are able to say another, and another, until we have gathered together a bouquet of letters, and a word is formed, and we keep gathering, until a full blessing is formed, and hope begins to rise. The essence of Rebbe Nachman's teaching is expressed in words of song, *lo l'hitya'esh, asur l'hitya'esh / do not despair; it is forbidden to despair.*

In a season whose light is threatened by the despair that is rife in these times, our task is to raise up light with greater fervor. The lighting of Chanukkah candles is a symbolic act, the menorah whose light shines out into the night, a reminder. A simple ritual is meant to inspire deeds that illumine a path of hope and dedication, which is what the word "Chanukkah" means. Each person is a candle in the world. In a time when greed has blinded so many, acts of generosity and kindness glow with extra brightness. It takes courage to rekindle values that have been defiled, to rededicate the sanctuary of a caring society.

As one person may feel her or his own personal despair and the gloom of darkness within, with so much beyond our control one person can still make a world of difference and a difference in the world. In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Miketz*, Yosef is the *mashbir*, the distributor of food in a time of famine, a giver of life. The root of *mashbir* is *shever*, which means "broken," here referring positively to one who "breaks out" food. The simple shifting of a single dot, from one side of the letter *shin* to the other, forms the letter *sin* and with it the word *sever*, "to look with hope." We are each as that single dot, the difference between remaining broken and looking ahead with hope.

*Parashat Miketz* and this Shabbos on which it falls shine with hope. Playing on the first words of the portion, *va'yehi miketz sh'natayim yamim/it came to pass at the end of two full years*, referring to the time when Yosef left prison, the rabbis draw on a verse from the Book of Job, *ketz sam la'choshech/God sets an end to darkness*. There are times of despair and times of hope in our own lives and in the world around us. Inevitably, hope and despair tend to be cyclical. Faith is the light that guides us through the dark times, and each one of us is the *shammas* with which to

kindle faith in others. This Shabbos is also *Rosh Chodesh*, the new moon of the month of *Teves*. At the very end of its cycle, the moon will not be visible tonight in the wintry sky. Even when its light is hidden, we know that the sliver of the new moon's crescent will soon emerge. Rosh Chodesh is a time of hope, a celebration of light renewed.

As we kindle the gentle lights of Chanukkah, and the soothing lights of Shabbos, and await the smiling light of the new moon, may our spirits be refreshed, and soar like a butterfly.

Shabbat shalom, Happy Chanukkah, and *Chodesh tov*,  
Rabbi Victor