

Dear Chavraya,

If you have been in Jerusalem, perhaps you have shopped at the Hamashbir department store. As with so many words in modern Hebrew, the name of the store is layered with Biblical allusion that is not lost on most Israelis. In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Miketz*, Yosef is referred to as *Hamashbir*, "the one who distributes grain." Having interpreted Pharaoh's dreams that told of seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine, Yosef becomes second only to Pharaoh in all the land of Egypt, responsible for the distribution of grain stored during the years of plenty; *And Yosef was the governor over the land, the one who distributed food to all the people of the land/hu hamashbir l'chol am ha'aretz.*

There is a fine line between brokenness and hope, despair and repair, a point of recognition in faith's imperceptible leap. It is all contained in the root of this word, *hamashbir*. *Shever* means brokenness. It comes to be the word for grain, as that which "breaks forth" from the earth. Ya'akov tells his children, *yesh shever b'Mitzrayim/there is grain in Egypt*. Of life "breaking forth," *hishbir* means to "give birth." Breaking out food from the storehouses of Egypt, Yosef is a life-giver. Remarkably, *shever* can also refer to the interpretation of dreams, the very way of insight that begins the process of Yosef coming to be *hamashbir/the giver of food*.

In a beautiful teaching, Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev looks beyond the sustaining of bodies. Of the *am ha'aretz/the people of the land*, those so bent over the plow that they are unable to look up, Yosef broke the yoke of their single-minded toil, *to raise them up to be called people of God/l'ha'alot otam v'likrot am Ha'shem*. The possibility of change, as in from downtrodden to one who looks up, is contained in the same root, with but a simple shift in perspective. When the dot of the *shin* slips from the right side to the left, the letter *sin* is formed and the word becomes *sever*, "to look," "to hope," "to look expectantly," brokenness become hope. In the praying of *Ashrei*, we say, *aynei kol elecha y'saberu/the eyes of all look hopefully to You*.

There is a fine line between brokenness and hope, the possibility of renewal or destruction contained in the same elemental realities. So the importance of one dot, of one person, of one small spark, wherein is contained the way of response to good and to evil, to what raises up and to what wreaks destruction down. Tonight we kindle the delicate flames of Chanukkah and of Shabbos, even as we grieve the devastation of flames gone wild in Israel. With brokenness of heart, *shever lev*, may our eyes behold in the flickering candlelight *sever lev*, the hopefulness of heart from which to reach out to those facing the fires that rage in the Land. May God as *Hamashbir*, Who breaks forth sustenance for body and soul, break the flames of destruction and help us to kindle the light of hope.

Shabbat Shalom and *Chanukkah Same'ach*,
Rabbi Victor