

Dear Chavraya,

Perhaps you received the same cynical and mean-spirited email that I did. It was clearly spam, which ordinarily I would have deleted immediately. Its subject line drew me for its tragic reflection on the sorry state of our society, "Profit from Foreclosures." Opening the email, I found an upbeat guide on how to profit from the misery of others.

Packed with drama, this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Vayeshev*, opens with a quietly powerful teaching that is rooted in a point of grammar. Offering a metaphor beyond its own often dry purpose, grammar is that convention of language which makes communication possible, and thereby understanding of one for another. *Vayeshev Ya'akov b'ereetz m'gurei aviv* / Jacob dwelled in the land of his father's sojourning.... The word *vayeshev* means "and he dwelled." With a simple revocalization we create a different verb form, *vayiyashev*, which means "and he made peace." To truly dwell is to make peace where we dwell.

To dwell together in a peaceful society, everyone needs a place to dwell. The rabbis taught long ago, *ayn mishpat, ayn shalom* / without justice there is no peace. Our failure to grasp this essential truth is the cause of so much strife in the world. World peace rooted in justice, in an equitable sharing of resources and the meeting of basic human needs, begins at home. The world is our dwelling place, and our nation but one room in God's house.

"Profit from Foreclosures" is the motto of a society that has foreclosed upon itself, whose social fabric is in tatters. With compassion and justice for all, may we reweave the commonweal and learn to make peace where we dwell.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor