

Dear Chavraya,

The beauty of darkness and the beauty of light come together tonight, each accentuating the beauty of the other. Chanukkah candles and Shabbos candles shedding their glow, brighter in the presence of old friend darkness...; shades of Simon and Garfunkle, "Darkness my old friend, I've come to walk with you again...."

I was at an interfaith clergy meeting this week. During a discussion about light in relation to Advent and Chanukkah, I raised a question about how do we understand darkness in this season of light, something I have been thinking about. One of the ministers present, a mother of two African American sons, spoke of being sensitive to the subtle message conveyed in common usage of "light and dark." As we celebrate *Chag Urim/the Festival of Light*, it is important to remember that there is neither intrinsic good nor bad in darkness or light. Darkness can be warm and comforting, its presence a time for thought and reflection; or it can be the opaque darkness of sadness and despair. Light can be the glow we feel in the presence of another, the light that guides us on life's path; or it can be the blinding flash of a bomb or the fire of hate.

On this Shabbos of Chanukkah, in the lingering glow of the first candle, we also announce the arrival of the new moon in the coming week. With *Rosh Chodesh*, the new month begins in a time of darkness. The moon is not visible due to the conjunction of the sun, the moon, and the earth. It is a darkness of hope and possibility, a time of celebration. Like the birth of a child, the emergence of the new crescent of light from the darkness of Heaven's womb, sings of darkness and light as of pregnancy and birth.

We light our candles in that indeterminate time between day and night, when the sky is streaked with dark and light. The rabbis called that time neither day nor night, but *beyn arbayim/between the evenings*, or *beyn hashmashot/between the suns*. It is a time of soulful yearning, of wholeness in the presence of two realities joined as one. It is a metaphor for Messianic time, when swords will be turned into plowshares and spears to pruning hooks, as we sing at the end of the Pesach Seder, "Draw near the day that is neither day nor night."

The first word of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Vayeshev*, reflects both the tension and its resolution. In one grammatical form, *vayeshev* means *and he settled*, as in "dwelled." In another form, *vayiyashev* means *and he made peace*, or "settled" a conflict/*yishuv sichsuch*. Embraced by the dark warmth of night unfolding, inspired to hope by the delicate dance of flickering candlelight, may our kindling tonight be a prayer for harmony in all the places where people dwell, in the beauty of darkness and of light.

Happy Chanukkah and Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi Victor