Dear Chavraya,

There is a certain peace of mind that comes with summer. Life slows down some, allowing moments of pause in which to reflect and renew. Whether in a garden, on a trail, or in a hammock, there is more time to think about life and the way of our living it. It shouldn't need to wait for summer, or for Shabbos in the gift of its weekly pause. While summer is unique from other seasons in the social structuring of summer-time, as Shabbos is from other days in its hallowing of time, our wellbeing requires moments of pause at all times and seasons. Pausing in the course of doing to consider the impact of our ways on others and ourselves, fosters a healthy ecology, environmental and human.

One of the more theologically challenging passages of prayer and of Torah is the second paragraph of the Sh'ma, whose source is in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Ekev*. Its "if-then" dynamic often read, I would say simplistically, as a teaching of reward and punishment, *V'hayah im shamo'a* is much deeper than that, offering God's warning for the natural consequence of human behavior. *V'haya im shamo'a tish'm'u el mitzvotai/If you will listen, really listen to My commandments…, then I will give the rain of your land in its season—the early rain and the late rain—so that you may gather in your grain, your new wine and your oil, and I will give you herbage on your field for your livestock; and you will eat and be satisfied.*

In the saying of the Sh'ma we each serve as witness to God's oneness, *Sh'ma Yisra'el Hashem Elokeynu Hashem Echad/Hear, O Israel, God our God, God is One*, and to the consequent oneness of humanity created as one in God's unique image. In *V'haya im shamo'a,* we are then called to affirm that oneness in all that we do, in our relationships with people and with the earth. If we really listen, if we are really cognizant of God's hope and of the earth's needs, then the rain will fall and fructify the land to give of her bounty. In the "if-then" equation, the consequence, of course, of not really listening is that the earth shall not give of her bounty: *God will hold back the heaven, and there will be no rain, and the soil will not yield its produce, and you will quickly vanish from the good land that God is giving you.*

After we are told that we will eat and be satisfied, *v'achalta v'savata*, we are warned not to give in to enticement, not to turn aside and serve other gods. Earlier in the *parasha* we are told *v'achalta, v'savata, u'verachta/and you shall eat, and you shall be satisfied, and you shall bless*. We turn aside to other gods, gods of consumption and appetite, when we consume the gifts of earth without gratitude, without pausing to bless and consider their Source. Without pausing to reflect on the consequence of actions, and on our own being and place in the web of creation, we bring harm to the land and to others and to ourselves. Gratification rather than gratitude drives a culture of consumption that lays waste to forests, poisons earth, water and air, and brings a dangerous fever to the fragile ecosystem that sustains all life. In the personal ecology of our lives and relationships, appetites destroy what is most precious. More innocently, surrendering to life's very real pressures without pause for love and joy, for renewal and reflection, causes meaning and purpose to quickly vanish.

In Chassidic teaching, the foreboding words *and you will quickly vanish/va'avadetem m'herah* are turned into their own corrective. The Baal Shem Tov taught: *a person needs to always be of peaceful mind, and not in a state of haste, and so should the words be understood "va'avadetem m'herah/and you will quickly vanish" — one needs to cause haste and hurriedness to vanish.* Engaged with the needs of the world and in the living of our lives, it is not likely to always know peace of mind. Creating time and space in which to slow down, to banish haste if but for a while in every season and in each day, we can find the peace of mind that comes more easily with summer-time and Shabbos-time.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor