

Dear Chavraya,

What does it mean to “walk in God’s ways?” Perhaps at first it seems obvious, to do good, to love peace and pursue justice, to make the world a better place. It is certainly all of that which God seeks of us, but also more. In the sublime challenge of the prophet Micah it becomes more personal, *higid l’cha adam/it has been told to you, oh mortal, what is good and what God seeks of you, only to do justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.* It is in the singular, addressed to Adam, every human, each of us. To walk in God’s ways is not meant to be an abstraction, but an entire way of life, a path unfolding in the moral choices of every day, that but for God remain unseen. We are a conduit for good or ill, channeling either into the world through deeds both great and small.

Of the *Taryag Mitzvot*, the 613 commandments, the 611<sup>th</sup> is found in this week’s Torah portion, *Parashat Ki Tavo*. The remaining two mandate the entire community to gather together to learn Torah in Jerusalem every seventh year following Sukkos, when the final harvest is in, and of the scroll from which Torah is learned, every Jew is to write their own. Encompassing in its scope, the 611<sup>th</sup> mitzvah is *lalechet bi’drachav/to walk in God’s ways*, giving summation to all that has come before. The commandment is given in the singular and in the present tense, *Of God you have caused it to be said today/hayom that God shall be a God to you/l’cha, and that you would walk in God’s ways.* It is addressed to each of us in the present tense of our own lives.

There is a beautiful 16<sup>th</sup> century commentary on these two simple words by Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz, known as the Holy Sh’loh, from the first letters of his major work, “Sh’nei Luchot HaB’rit/Two Tablets of the Covenant.” As the source of the 611<sup>th</sup> commandment, the Sh’loh refers thematically to *Parashat Ki Tavo* itself as *Lalechet Bi’drachav*. With touching acknowledgement of human frailty, the Sh’loh explains that we are *to emulate the ways of God, according to our ability/k’fi y’cholatelynu*, encouraging without demanding or assuming perfection. We may stumble, but at least we are on the path, knowing the way.

To walk in God’s ways is our response to being human. For the Sh’loh it is an expression of gratitude and responsibility at having been created, *ever since the human was fashioned in the image of the blessed Creator, one is obligated to emulate God in every way that is possible/b’chol mah d’efshar and to walk in God’s ways.* Again, so cognizant of the need to strive without fear of failure, we walk God’s path in the realm of the possible, in the world of human beings, not angels. To walk in God’s ways is to emulate God’s attributes. Midrash tells us, *Eilu darchei Hakadosh Boruch Hu/These are the ways of the Holy Blessed One*, and there follows the “Thirteen Attributes,” which we will recite before the Holy Ark many times during the coming Days of Awe: *Adoshem, Adoshem, Kel rachum v’chanum... , gracious and compassionate, patient, abounding in kindness and truth, preserving kindness for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and granting pardon.*

The only word that appears twice among God’s attributes, other than God’s name, is the word *chesed/kindness*, underscoring the essence of God’s being that we are to emulate. A kinder, gentler, more just and peaceful world begins with us, and with the Godly ways we emulate in the small worlds of our lives. When

we sing the Thirteen Attributes, we are singing out the personal qualities we wish to live by, without which they cannot flow through each of us into the great world around. God's ways are made real through the holy deeds of individuals. Walking God's path, we give and receive, each one of us. As a community, we are a gathering of individuals dedicated to a common purpose, the *chavraya*. Collectively too, as we strive to walk in God's ways we bring kindness among us. Through our newly formed Nehar Shalom *Chesed* Committee, we reach out to each other in times of joy and sorrow. It is a beautiful expression of what it means to be a community, creating a path from house to house, giving and receiving the blessing of kindness, walking in God's ways.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor