

Dear Chavraya,

One of my favorite paintings is not a work of the great masters. In golden hue, both stark and soft, it is instead a depiction of the menorah as described in the Torah. Painted by my oldest daughter, Noa, as part of a ninth grade *Tanach* project, it hangs in the shtibl on the wall to the side of the front bay windows just behind the study and kiddush table. Pausing to touch the mezuzah, I love to look across at it and receive its light every time I enter the room.

The instructions for the menorah, as it was to appear in the *mishkan*, the desert sanctuary, and later in the *Beys Hamikdosh*, the Holy Temple that stood in Jerusalem, are given to Moses in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat T'rumah*. The instructions are very detailed, easily a section of Torah that, bleary-eyed, one might understandably skip over. Addressed to Moses in the singular, the directive to make the menorah might symbolically be addressed to each one of us: *And make a menorah of pure gold/v'asitah m'norat zahav tahor; the menorah, its base and its shaft shall be made hammered out of one piece; its cups, its knobs and its flowers shall be made of one piece with it. And six branches shall go out from its sides.... Whoever kindles the lamps shall have them shine toward the central shaft.*

In the unity of its construction and the emanation of its light, the menorah becomes a symbol of unity. Joining all facets of Creation, the menorah is meant to be a beacon, illuminating the intrinsic unity between people and nature, people and people, and people and God. As a "tree of light," the menorah brings us back to the very beginning, to the garden of light from which flows a river of light, *nahara d'n'hora*. The central stalk, which a careful reading suggests is itself the menorah, is the fourth light as counted from either side and is likened to the sun, created on the fourth day of Creation. As the sun illumines the earth, it is the light of every soul that gives light to God; *ner Hashem nishmat adam/God's candle is the human soul*, each one precious. Of God's spirit, the menorah reminds us of the way we are to be in this world. Leading the Babylonian exiles back to the Land of Israel, the prophet Zecharia is shown a great menorah in a vision. Confused, an angel tells him of its meaning, instructing him in the way of true home-coming; *lo v'chayil v'lo v'cho'ach/Not by military force and not by not by physical strength, but by My spirit, says the Holy One of Hosts.*

When the menorah's light seems dim, the vision of its unity so far off, we are to look each month to the night sky and see in the moon's cycle the hope of light returning. This Shabbos of *Parashat T'rumah* is also Rosh Chodesh, the new moon. Looking to the western sky at sunset, the sliver of the new moon's crescent will be visible for but a short time, reminding us of the journey toward fullness, the moon's and ours. When Rosh Chodesh coincides with Shabbos, we read a special *haftorah* in the morning from the prophet Isaiah. In a time of darkness, God reaches out and says to Israel, *hineni noteh eyleha k'nahar shalom/Behold, I extend to her as a river of peace*. It is the source of our name.

Last night, as we met in the shtibl with members of the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, a Somali Muslim looked up and asked of the verse above the doors of the Holy Ark. As I read the Hebrew and shared its meaning, Ahmed explained with a great smile of recognition that in Arabic the word for river is *nihar*. It

made me think of a Muslim friend of several years whose name is also Ahmed, and with whom I have delighted in much linguistic bridge-building. Later in the evening, wanting to include him in the conversation, I sent an email to him, also taking the opportunity to ask of his family's wellbeing in Egypt. By morning he had written back, telling me he was writing from Cairo, where he had gone to be with his family during this difficult time. Recalling the parallel that we had also once discussed between the Hebrew and Arabic words for river, he added, "Also, *Nahar* in Arabic is morning or daytime, when light flows all around!"

We are the light that flows all around. Six branches of a menorah fashioned of one piece of pure gold, as painted by Noa, a reminder upon our wall, shining together toward the central shaft supporting them all. Six days shining now toward Shabbos, the light of our striving flowing home as a river of peace.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor