

Dear Chavraya,

Like water, light fills available space, ever seeking to expand, to transcend limitations and barriers. In its mystical interpretation of Torah, the *Zohar* speaks of a “river of light” that flows from Eden, *n’hara d’n’hora*. In the Aramaic of the *Zohar*, the two words are almost the same, conveying the flow of light out into the world.

In this week’s Torah portion, *Parashat T’zaveh*, a light of hope is raised up. The people are told to bring *pure olive oil, pressed for lighting, to make light spring up continually* in the *mishkan*, the desert sanctuary. This is the basis for the *ner tamid*, the eternal light that burns in synagogues above the holy ark, signifying the light of Torah. The Torah does not say to “kindle light,” using the more familiar verb, *l’hadlik*, as in the lighting of Shabbos candles, *l’hadlik ner shel Shabbat*, but *l’ha’alot/to cause to go up*. The striking of a match is not needed, nor steel on stone, rather a pre-existing flame is transferred to raise up new light. Think of the *shammash* candle at Chanukkah, whose flame is held to the wick of a companion. In a moment of shared light, the flame of two goes up as one, neither diminished in its essence for sharing.

Like the pure source of a crystal mountain stream, we are each the source of a unique river of light. Flowing out into the sea of humanity, our own light joins the many tributaries of luminescent rivers. Sharing our light with others, we serve a greater good, like the *shammash*, the serving candle, causing more brilliant light to go up in the world, filling more space with hope. In the Book of Proverbs, *Sefer Mishley*, God sings to us, reaching out, seeking our light, *Ner Hashem nishmat adam/God’s candle is the human soul*. Pure in its essence, the soul is compared to the *shemmen zayit zach*, the pure olive oil that is brought to the *mishkan*. We are each a lamp of God in this world. As God said at the very beginning of Creation, *y’hi or/let there be light*, so it is a continuing call to each of us, co-creators with God in the unfolding of Creation toward the great light of peace.

In its simplicity, the old freedom song, *This Little Light of Mine*, is a joyful answer to God, *This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine..., wherever there is hatred, I’m gonna let it shine..., let it shine, let it shine, let it shine....* It won’t just shine by itself, though. Our souls speak through word and deed, and so we cause light to go up continually. We are each a *ner tamid*, from which our own light flows out into the world, joining the great river of light that flows from Eden. Wherever we go, in all that we do, may our light shine, surrounding hatred and strife, transcending all that divides people from each other. Speaking up, singing out, quietly soothing, we allow healing light to shine through us. As we light Shabbos candles tonight, may their light fill the sacred space of home and heart, calling forth from every soul God’s own candlelight.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor