

Dear Chavraya,

We are standing in the gateway to Pesach, the gathering place where freedom road begins. This is Shabbos Hagadol, the “great Shabbos” that immediately precedes Pesach, a moment of pause in the preparation, a time to consider the journey and the way ahead. One of the sources for the calling of this Shabbos is from the haftarah that we read from the prophet Malachi: *Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of God.* That great day is *Moshiach Tzeit/time of the Messiah*, the time finally arrived at of swords turned into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. It is the time prayed for and labored for that is also called *Yom Shekulo Shabbos/the day that is all Shabbos*, a new day when Shabbos peace will fill the whole world. And it is that same great and awesome day that is called *Pesach L’atid/Pesach of the future*, time of the ultimate redemption when humankind will stand together on the distant shore and sing, “free at last, free at last.”

Offering a vision through which to enter Pesach, Malachi then offers a way that may at first surprise. Not with stirring pronouncements, such as “let My people go,” but with stirring commitments to do justly in our own closest relationships do the first steps of the great journey begin. Changing the world begins with each of us, the ultimate vision expressed in very personal terms. When we have made the world ready, doing our part, not just waiting, then Eliyahu will come and announce the arrival of the Messiah. Malachi points to where the birth pangs of Moshiach stir, at home: *I will send you Elijah the Prophet..., that he may turn the heart of the parents back to the children, and the heart of the children back to their parents/v’hayshiv lev-avot al banim v’lev banim al avotam....*

As there are times when darkness fills the world, however bright the vision and sincere the effort, so there are times when darkness fills the world of our own lives. We find ourselves feeling trapped in a *maytzar/narrow place*, root of *Mitzrayim/Egypt*, squinting toward the light, even in the very place sometimes where Malachi looks for hope. As Pesach is about exile and redemption in collective terms, so it is about exile and redemption in personal terms. Encouraging us to always look toward the light, a beautiful teaching emerges from this week’s Torah portion, *Parashat Tzav*. Only the *olah/ascent* offering was to be completely consumed on the altar. It was to burn through the night until dawn, the new day’s fire to be kindled from its embers. From this simple instruction at the beginning of *Tzav*, Rebbe Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, the *Ma’or Eynayim/Light of the Eyes*, offers soothing words for when our spirits are down: *All night until morning, that refers also to one’s own darkness, which she or he is able to lift up and to make from it morning light.*

As we look toward that great and awesome day of God, the dawn of redemption for the whole world, even as it begins so close to home, may whatever darkness each one knows be lifted up on wings of dawn, Pesach promise in the air, souls touched by healing light, a kiss upon the brow.

Shabbat shalom and Chag Same’ach / Good Shabbos and good Yontev,
Rabbi Victor