

Dear Chavraya,

There is an almost tangible excitement in the air as we approach Pesach. Even in the fitful coming of spring, there is something in the turning of seasons, a sense of nature's own awareness of change within itself that sings of liberation and renewal. We become attuned to the way of change, to the turning in time that is happening around us. The very first instructions concerning Pesach in the Torah are immediately preceded by the commandment concerning Rosh Chodesh, to mark time by sighting the crescent of the new moon (Ex. 12:1-2). Pesach occurs at the full moon, a time of hope fulfilled, every month reminding us of the journey from hidden to revealed.

Change in the natural realm happens independently of us, as long as we humans don't destroy the delicate mechanisms upon which all life depends. Of the human quest for freedom, we ourselves are the actors, the ones upon whom change depends. That is the spiritual and even political message that underlies all the drudgery of cleaning for Pesach. The *chametz* that we strive to rid ourselves of represents all that we seek to change, all the ways of oppression, of oppressing and being oppressed, in our own lives and in the world. The process of removing *chametz* is meant to remind that change doesn't just happen, that freedom doesn't just arrive. Preparing for Pesach is hard work, all the little details, perhaps seeming insignificant in themselves, are the stepping-stones to the great and awesome day.

It starts small, right at home, in the details of our lives. That is the message of this Shabbos just before Pesach, *Shabbat HaGadol/the great Shabbos*. Rising to a crescendo of hope, the *Haftorah* from the prophet Malachi sings: *Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of God; that he may turn the heart of the parents to the children, and the heart of the children to their parents* (Malachi 3:23-24)... It starts in the small worlds of our own lives, making peace and wholeness there before it can happen in the great world beyond. The great and awesome day of God of which Malachi tells is not only the source from which comes the name *Shabbat HaGadol*. More importantly, the vision of that day, made real in our own homes, is the source of its own fulfillment. The very words are meant to remind that the goal of Pesach is to bring that great and awesome day which Elijah will announce, the day of swords turned to plowshares and spears to pruning hooks, the day of Moshiach/the Messiah, of peace. It won't just happen, we need to prepare the way and make it happen. That is why it begins at home.

It is hard work to prepare for Pesach, great meaning hidden among the details. That is the metaphor in the nature of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Tzav*. It is one of those portions that seems opaque on the surface, filled with details of the offerings to be made in the sanctuary. We look more closely, at the names and nuance in reference to the offerings, all meant to restore wholeness, to bring people close again to each other and to God, to turn the hearts of one to another. There we find the peace offering, the *sh'lamim*. More than *shalom*, the

word suggests *shalem/wholeness,completeness*. There is an entire teaching in the interplay of grammatical forms. There can only be peace when there is wholeness, when the circle of human belonging is complete, *shalem*.

From such a hint hidden there among the details, the rabbis create a treatise of teachings on peace. There in a *midrash* on this at first opaque Torah portion, the rabbis offer practical guidance toward bringing the “great and awesome day of God,” the ultimate *Shabbat HaGadol*. That it is up to us to bring that day is brought home in a teaching on the unique nature of the *mitzvah* to pursue peace: *Chiskiya said, “Great is peace, for it is written concerning all mitzvot, if you see, if you encounter, if it happens; that is, if the opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah comes to you, you need to do it, and if not, you don’t need to do it. But in regard to peace, it is written (Psalm 34:15), Bakesh shalom v’rodfehu/seek peace and pursue it – meaning, seek it in your own place, and pursue it in another.*

Shabbat HaGadol, as it comes in the midst of preparing for Pesach, calls us to be *rodfei shalom/pursuers of peace*. We are the crucial link, called to do our part in bringing the great and awesome day. In the verses following the commandment to mark Rosh Chodesh, to look to the cycle of the moon for inspiration and hope, the rabbis deduce two *P’sachim*, two Pesachs. The first is *Pesach Mitzrayim/the Pesach of Egypt*, the actual Exodus, observed once for all time, only by those who actually came out of Egypt. The second is *Pesach L’dorot/the Pesach of the Generations*, our Pesach, as observed every year since the first year after the Exodus. The rabbis speak of a third Pesach, *Pesach L’atid/the Pesach of the Future*. That is the Pesach that has never happened, not yet. It is the ultimate redemption, the flowering of peace and freedom for all. *Pesach L’atid* and *Shabbat HaGadol* refer to the same time, and so too *the Day that is all Shabbos/Yom She’kulo Shabbos*.

As in the way of our preparing for Pesach each year, so too in our preparing for Shabbos each week, it is not for these holy days that come with the turning of days and weeks and seasons for which we are really preparing. In all of the hard work of getting ready, we are really preparing for *Shabbat HaGadol* and *Pesach L’atid*. If we prepare with enough *kavanah/intention* and commitment, realizing in the process to carry our preparation beyond the walls of our own homes and into the world beyond, then every Shabbos can become *Shabbat HaGadol* and every Pesach, *Pesach L’atid*. If we can remove the *chametz* that is the rising of arrogance and strife, of violence and oppression, of all that divides people from each other, then as surely as the seasons turn, we shall bring that great and awesome day of God.

Shabbat shalom and Chag same’ach,
Rabbi Victor