

Dear Chavraya,

The challenge of ideals is not just to think them, but to live them and make them real in the world. Planted at the beginning of time, the ideal of a peaceful world is expressed in the essence of Shabbos. To truly “make” Shabbos is not simply to observe the weekly Shabbos, but to infuse the world with Shabbat shalom in the weekday world of our lives. Shabbos is an entire teaching of what it means to make ideals real, to live a future reality now. Meant to step back from strife and struggle, we spend one seventh of all of our days on this earth living *as though* it was that time. The way of Shabbos is a reminder not to wait, but to live the ideal in the moment, or the world we pray for will never come. To the degree that we live by our ideals, we bring our own finest presence into the worlds of our lives.

For all of the beauty and the uplift of soul that is the gift of Jewish spiritual practice, the prayerful and meditative that brings us to a deeper place within, we are not meant to stay there. Until we come to the “day that is all Shabbos” for every single person, for every nation and people, *Yom shekulo Shabbos*, then we have to go out from Shabbos, smelling the sweet spices of Havdalah to remind us of what we have tasted, inspiring us to strive. It is a truism that Judaism is not a monastic religion. God is found on the streets and in the market place, in the grit and grime of day-to-day life. It is there that we are challenged to live our ideals, along all of our life’s paths, through whatever terrain they take us and test us. In a beautiful teaching on last week’s Torah portion, as we completed the third book of the Torah, *Vayikra*, the Slonimer Rebbe speaks to our task, *that each one shall raise up all the goings of the world to the Blessed Holy One/she’ ya’aleh et kol halichot olam l’Hashem Yisborach*. We are not to avoid the ways of the world, but to raise them up to God.

Continuing on the journey of Torah and life, we come this week to the fourth book of the Torah, the Book of Numbers, *B’midbar/in the Desert*; an apt metaphor. “Numbers” refers to the census with which this week’s Torah portion, *Parashat B’midbar* begins. Counting each person is a reminder that each person counts, that the community, as the minyan, is formed of individuals. The individual is not to be lost to the collective; and the moral quality of the collective depends on that of the individual. In a comment to the beginning of the book and the portion of *B’midbar*, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that the desert sanctuary, the *Mishkan*, which forms the primary content of *Vayikra*, sets a standard and a calling for Israel. The *Mishkan* represents an ideal that is “to be translated into reality by every individual member of the nation as well as by the nation as a whole.” Recognizing the tension and the challenge, Hirsch goes on to say that the “Fourth Book resumes the factual narrative. It shows us the relationship of the nation of Israel, as it actually is, to the ideal of its calling....”

In a nation and a time of fallen heroes, when expressed ideals are lived more in the breach than in reality, the challenge to make ideals real is given to each one of us. We are the ordinary heroes through whom change will come. In the sanctuary of Shabbos, may our souls be refreshed and our ideals renewed, and in our return to the world as it is, parched sands to be watered with hope.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor