

Dear Chavraya,

I used to love watching home movies in our living room when I was a kid. My dad was the faithful scribe, his quill a camera, recording life with light and love. Transformed into a cinema, the living room was truly that, filled with life renewed and relived. The screen was an old window shade hung from the mantle piece above the fireplace, the clicking sound of the old projector and the whir of its fan as music rising from the orchestra pit. The darkened room became a time machine, through which to revisit vacations past, whether of a recent summer's camping trip or of those from long ago. Or perhaps as the sprockets turned we returned along the film's path to significant moments in the story of our family, to birthdays and graduations, Bar or Bas Mitzvahs, moments both tender and zany. There were the moments when those no longer among us suddenly came to life again, so full and present, sighs and laughter welcoming them back into our embrace, the most precious of visitors. I especially loved the rewinding of the film at the end of its showing, every frame of life happening on the screen in reverse order, people still facing forward as they melted into the past, fast-flickering images passing like a river in time flowing backward all the way to its source in the very beginning, ready then to start over again.

I thought of those old home movies on Simchas Torah morning this week as we completed another year's cycle of Torah reading. As we came to the end of Deuteronomy, concluding the reading with great fanfare, without missing a beat we then started to roll the scroll all the way back to the beginning. The parchment turned quickly upon the wooden rollers, the *atzei chayyim/trees of life* clicking on the reading table as sprockets in film, song filling the room, *nigunim* carried on our breaths as the whirring of a fan guiding us home. As columns of dancing letters quickly passed we encountered old friends and loved ones. We had just cried upon Moses' death and here he was again in all of his glory, a precious visitor returned. And Miriam was there once again, the spray from her well of living waters kissing our brows along time's backward flow to its source. There was Aaron in all his finery, glowing in the way we remembered him. And there was Pinchas, so hard to be around for his anger and zeal, seeming a little softer now along the hazy path of return. We made our way back through the harsh passages of painful encounters, having learned to navigate their swirling eddies going forward, now reminded in passing back through them that we would inevitably encounter them again. There were the daughters of Tzelophchad so bravely proclaiming the right of women to inherit, even in our passing back before their time, needing to remember not to allow justice to be undone. Laws jumped out reminding us of Shabbos and Holy Days, as the very one were in the midst of now, whose way of return brought such poignant joy. If we were counting, thirty-six reminders along the way that we were slaves in Egypt, therefore to be kind to strangers whose burdened souls we know as our own. And then we came back through so many generations to the holy mothers and fathers, embracing each of them in all of their frail greatness, their grandeur and vulnerability, their triumphs and tragedies. And then there we were, before we knew it, back at the very beginning, *B'reishit bara Elokim et ha'shamayim v'et ha'aretz/In the beginning of..., God created the heavens and the earth....* There was only one way to go now, forward, so we began again.

And that is where we are now, right at the beginning. This is Shabbos *B'reishit*, the Shabbos of beginnings, the Shabbos that beckons us forward. While every week is not the week of *Parashat B'reishit*, the rabbis in fact call the Shabbos of every week *Shabbos B'reishit*. Every Shabbat is a reminder and celebration of creation, a chance to look back, to rewind, and then to go forward. On this Shabbos of creation, we feel God's flow of blessing as we follow each day's creation and the miracle of life becoming. Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev teaches of that abundant flow of life coming through each of us in our own way of receiving it, then each to shape it according to our own needs, desires, and ways. The Berditchever teaches that everything that exists in the spiritual plane has its counterpart in the material plane, *kol mah she'yesh b'ruchaniyut yesh ka'mo'hu b'gashmiyut*. So our journey through the holy month of Tishrei now enters real time and the real world. Our challenge is to bring the depth of spiritual awareness and interpersonal connection of the season just passed into the flow of time as it opens in earnest into the new year.

Playing life forward now, we are standing in the same place and yet it is so different, seen now through the lens of new experience and new awareness. As faithful scribes with light and love as our quills, may the stories we tell in the coming year be recorded as blessings, bringing joy and laughter in the moment, and again one day when we scroll back through them and remember with love the experiences of which they tell.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor