

Dear Chavraya,

Alas, the sukkah has been put away for another year, the white yontev coverings removed from the shtibl, time turning and returning. I find it hard to describe even to myself just how I feel as we say goodbye to the intensity of the past month and more. I feel somewhat jet-lagged after a long journey through many time zones. I am tired and happy, content and distracted. I am ready to let go of the intensity and its stress, but touched by sadness in leaving that very intensity with its depth of meaning and connection. On this Shabbos we bless the coming month of *Marcheshvan/bitter Cheshvan*. The prefix of *mar/bitter*, as in *marror*, has become part of the month's name, bitter for its lack of holy days beyond Shabbos, in such stark contrast to the fullness of the past month of *Tishrei*. Trying still to honor this new month, as every month should be honored for its unique place in time's turning, as each person encountered is to be honored, I nevertheless admit to feeling a certain postpartum sadness, if you will, in letting go of all that has been.

The swirl through time is felt in a powerfully poignant way as we spiral from the very end of the Torah to the very beginning, completing one year's cycle of reading and right away beginning the next. As soon as the Torah is completed, reading the last lines of Deuteronomy on Simchas Torah morning, we turn right back to Bereishit and begin again. Some synagogues have a Torah set at the beginning, ready and waiting for the next aliyah. Without enough Torahs to do that, there is a gift in the necessity of quickly needing to scroll through the whole Torah from end to beginning, watching all of the past year's reading unfold in reverse direction on our way back upstream to the source. So time passes and we return to the Place from whence we have come.

There is a rabbinic saying that both touches me and confuses me, a teaching that I hear in my uncle Benny's voice, offering it to me when I was starting rabbinical school, having just moved to New York, having a hard time adjusting, "Vicky," he would say, "*kol hatcholos koshos*," *all beginnings are difficult*. It is in its own way an offer of encouragement, just keep going, you'll get beyond the beginning, beyond the difficulties. As we complete the Torah, I sometimes feel that endings too can be difficult, whether with Torah or with life. Such partings become twofold at the end of the Torah, saying farewell to Moses on his death, even as we leave the familiar journey through the desert. As we return, though, following the call of our calendar and of its seasons, we step into the garden and are uplifted by the freshness of beginnings. All of creation opens before us, breathtaking in its beauty, terrifying in the responsibilities that come with its possibilities.

As we came to the last two very special aliyot on Simchas Torah morning, one person usually to be honored with the final aliyah in the past year's cycle and one person to be honored with the first aliyah of the new year's cycle, I suggested that we form two groups for a collective sharing of these aliyot. I asked people who feel more drawn to completions, to finishing the task at hand, to take the aliyah that would complete the Torah's reading. I then asked those who feel more drawn to beginning new ventures and setting out into the unknown to take the aliyah that would begin the new cycle of reading. Depending on which we

choose or identify with, so endings are sweet or difficult and so too are beginnings.

It is *Shabbos B'reishit*, the Shabbos with which we begin the new year's cycle of Torah reading. There is an amazement that comes with being at this moment in time. WOW, a World Of Wonder lies before us and we are called to enter. For all the ache of leaving the familiar, the challenge of beginning again is softened by the beauty we are called to see. Helping us to take some of what has been with us, the seeds of the beginning are carried with us to be planted all along the way. With beautiful insight, the rabbis came to call every single Shabbos *Shabbos B'reishit*. While only this week's Shabbos is that of the Torah portion *B'reishit*, that of *Parashat B'reishit*, every week's Shabbos is a reminder of the beginning, a reminder of our first steps in a new journey, helping us to remember the beauty as well as the difficulties of the beginning, aware of growth and change as we remember from where we have come and seek the path to where we go.

When the kids were young, before taking down the sukkah to store it away for another year, I would have them each stand in the sukkah and put a growth line on the wall in order to notice the changes from year to year as they grew. Of endings and beginnings, may we notice the changes within ourselves and welcome the opportunity to take note. In the respite it offers, may the bitterness of Marcheshvan give way to sweetness as we find time to reflect on all that has been and look ahead to all that might be.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor