

Dear Chavraya,

I have found myself on the verge of tears at many points this week, as I'm sure many of you have. There is nothing more terrifying than the specter of nuclear war. And there is no one more vile and depraved than a leader who would countenance the use of nuclear weapons, of bathing the world in such fire and fury, whether the words are spoken in English or in Korean.

I have not felt this fear for some time, that of the destructive immediacy and magnitude of nuclear weapons. The weapons have remained among us, but easier to ignore, their continued presence a shameful reminder of humanity's stunted pace of moral evolution. As others of a certain era, I remember the nuclear terror of the Cold War era. I remember standing at the window of my fifth grade classroom in Winthrop at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, watching warships steaming out of Boston Harbor. Coming home from school, I did not know what to make of armed soldiers marching alongside the playground behind our house, along a road between the playground and a missile tracking station that was our neighbor just beyond. I remember the clap of thunder one night that sent me screaming from my bed to my parents' room, sure the end had come.

No one has a right to subject children and their parents, anyone anywhere, to such terror. No one has a right to subject the earth and creation itself to the possibility of its own catastrophic demise. No one has a right to subject God to the horrifying possibility that it was all a mistake, that evil might in the end outweigh good, that the angel of Truth was right so long ago in warning God not to create human beings who would only bring destruction.

The specter has raised its head through bellicose words and vain, neither hindered nor haunted by historical memory, during the week marking the seventy-second *yahrzeit* of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And it came a week after Tisha B'Av, remembering the victims of the fire and fury of Babylon and Rome, of the Crusades and of the pogroms, of Auschwitz. And it came as we entered the *sheva d'n'chemta/the Seven Weeks of Comfort* that follow Tisha B'Av, that offer soothing and promise of surcease from suffering. It is personal for us. We know what it means to walk through fire and fury, what it means to suffocate in the noxious fumes of hate.

We also know what it means to believe in spite of all in the coming of Moshiach, in a prophet's vision fulfilled, of swords yet turned to plowshares and spears to pruning hooks, of humanity dwelling beneath the vine and fig tree in peace and unafraid. And we also know that fulfillment will not just happen, that peace will not just come, that the Moshiach is waiting for us.

That is our challenge, not to be immobilized by fear, but to channel fear into action, to harness the power of faith into activism. In truth, we do not know what will be, nor have we ever at the start of any noble campaign for the sake of justice and peace. Through action, we offer the possibility of change, sowing seeds of hope. In all the ways of expressing love, we water and nurture those seeds, warming them with the sunshine of smiles and hugs, of bedtime stories, and

random deeds of kindness. Modeling faith and courage, for ourselves and for our children, we should never think there is nothing we can do. Moral choices offer ways of action. If there are consequences to bad actions, so too there are to good actions, possibilities set in motion as ripples on the water.

And as Jews we learn Torah and make Shabbos, a refuge in time that envisions the vision's fulfillment. We wrestle with the violence of the "harsh passages," of Torah and life, and we learn in the wrestling how to respond and find our way through to a new shore beyond. In the *Moreh N'vuchim/the Guide for the Perplexed* (3:50), Maimonides offers a principle that becomes a timeless challenge, that all of the tellings of Torah are meant to bring us on a path of repair, *ad she'lo yihiyeh beyn b'nei adam avel v'chamas/until there shall not be among human beings injustice and violence*.

The choice stands before us in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Ekev*. The first word of the *parsha* is *v'haya/and it shall be*. That simple word is understood as an expression of joy, *v'haya hu lashon simcha/v'haya is the language of joy*. Hope is planted with the first step of the journey; we are not to give up on joy. We can still smile and laugh, and so we must. Immediately after that first word is a vertical line to guide us in reading and singing the holy text, meant as a sign to pause, to take a breath, as a rest in music, as Shabbos in the flow of days. It is all held in the balance, in that pause. And the verse continues, *v'haya ekev tish'm'un/and it shall be | on the heels of your hearing*. *Ekev* is formed from the same root as heel, *akev*, and so comes to refer to that which follows from our actions, to the consequences of our behavior. It is also the root of *akavah/provocation*, and of *ikvot/footseps*. Rather than provoking and bringing out the worst, we can extend a hand and walk together.

Offering hope from that word of joy and possibility, Rabbi Yitzchak Meir of Rothenberg, the *Chiddushei HaRiM*, urges us to listen for the footsteps of the Messiah, *b'ikvot m'shicha tish'm'un*. We need only listen to the footsteps of every child to know the sound. Following in their footsteps, may we bring the day that is all Shabbos. Pausing now to light candles and behold their light, may the gently dancing flames be the only fire to behold. After Shabbos, renewed and refreshed, may we organize and do the work that is to be done, that no child shall be afraid and all shall dwell beneath their vine and fig tree in peace and unafraid.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor