

Dear Chavraya,

In shul last Shabbos, we had guests among us, long time friends of Nehar Shalom, Dana, Martin, and Raffi. Over lunch, little Raffi asked if I wanted to hear a Rebbe Nachman song. I was startled simply by the question, let alone by the song that followed. As he began to sing, his sweet voice shined as sound became light. The words touched my heart more than ever before, carried on the tender voice of a child, a child too young to understand the depth of Rebbe Nachman's challenge or of his own role as comforter and conveyer. As Raffi sang, he gave gentle voice to Rebbe Nachman and his teaching: *Rebbe Nachman mey'Breslov kach omer, "lo l'hitya'esh, lo l'hitya'esh, asur l'hitya'esh/Rebbe Nachman of Breslov would say, "do not despair, do not despair, it is forbidden to despair."* I was stunned simply by a child's ability to say the words regardless of to what degree they were understood. I pray that this child and all children have no experience of despair and of the life experience from which despair emerges. As we sat and joined Raffi in song, I added some additional words attributed to Rebbe Nachman, *im higiya z'man kasha, rak lismo'ach yesh, rak lismo'ach yesh, rak lismo'ach yesh/if a hard time comes, there is only to rejoice, there is only to rejoice.*

It is the last words that I find most difficult. I try to understand them not for the harsh challenge to rejoice in the coming of difficulties themselves, but as a reminder to seek out that for which to be joyful, to find meaning, even in the midst of hard times. And not to despair, that is the essence. The two parts of the teaching go together. If we can notice that about which to be joyful, that in which to find meaning, then we push away despair. There is meaning now and joy, even in the midst of so much that would seem to deny their presence. The very sound of a child's voice singing such words becomes the message of the words themselves, there is hope, there is meaning, such tender shoots to care for.

I find myself drawn deeper to do the work we need to do, not thinking about whether we can address this issue or that issue or how to do all that needs to be done. It is what I wrote about last week, how to hold it all, how to accept the challenge to keep going. Working together we keep going. At a Black Lives Matter program this week for the Mass Board of Rabbis we were asked at one point to identify verses from a page of citations that speak to us. My eyes immediately went to the teaching from Pirke Avot to which I referred in last week's letter, *lo alecha ham'lacha ligmor/it is not upon you to complete the task, but you are not free to exempt yourself from it.* A Black Lives Matter program, a gun violence prevention program, reaching out to the Muslim community, we find faith in the doing and in the doing we find the faith to keep doing.

Our faith is rooted in the belief that ultimately we can bring change. It is the meaning found in the opening words of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Miketz*. The word *miketz* refers to the end, in this case to the end of Yosef's time in prison. It is understood for its deeper allusions to the end of days, to that time of wholeness and harmony beyond the strife and violence of these days, to the time of swords turned to plowshares and spears to pruning hooks. Midrash draws from a verse in the Book of Job and offers insight into our *parsha*, and into our time, all time, *ketz sam la'choshech/put an end to darkness*. We are encouraged in taking up the challenge, told so simply, *time is given to the world, only so many*

years in which they shall make their way in deep darkness/z'man natan la'olam kama shanim ya'aseh ba'afelah. It is a way of encouraging, not as though darkness is ordained, but as recognition of what is and of what can be. It is a way of gently teaching, "*do not despair.*" As words carried on the voice of a young child, seeds upon the wind, they are planted in the furrows of our hearts, the sprouting of hope come home. I asked Dana where Raffi had learned the song. She laughed and said that she had learned it from me and taught it to Raffi. Of homecoming and wholeness, circles unbroken, may we raise up light, and love, and song.

Shabbat shalom and Happy Chanukkah,
Rabbi Victor