

Dear Chavraya,

There are times when even as adults, perhaps especially as adults that we want to know just what will be down the road. Whether of what shall transpire in our own lives as we age, or in the turning of the world and time, there is something alluring and deceptively comforting, if only we could know. It is deceptively comforting because in knowing the future, the future becomes closed to us, closed to our striving and our yearning. Knowledge of the future may allow us to prepare more fully for its coming, so its allure. It would also likely foster a sense of fatalism, removing the impetus and inspiration for our own role in shaping the future and the path to its fulfillment.

In one of the beautifully subtle ways of the Torah's teaching, this is all held in a small detail of scribal convention in the way the physical Torah is written. This week's Torah portion, *Parashat Vayechi*, is the only portion in the Torah that is called a *parasha s'tumaha/a closed portion*. It refers to the absence of any space between it and the preceding portion. That closed space comes symbolically to represent the closing of Yakov's eyes upon his deathbed and the closing off of his prophetic vision, of his ability to tell of what will be.

As Yaakov prepares to die, his family gathered by his bedside, he tells his children, *gather yourselves as one and I will tell you/he'asfu v'agida l'chem what will befall you in the end of days/b'acharit ha'yamim*. He then says, *Keep together and listen/hikav'tzu v'shimu, O children of Yaakov, and listen to your father Yisrael!* With two words of gathering, tension builds, ears turned to hear of what will be in the end of days. We wait, and we still wait, but the awaited words never come. Of what will be remains a mystery, the future never told. The Rabbis say that at the moment Yaakov was about to speak, the end was closed to him, the *Sh'chinah* removed.

We can only imagine the disappointment among those gathered around their father's bedside, beginning to breathe again of necessity if not relief. With both of our ancestor's names invoked, Yaakov and Yisrael, we too are included as the children of Yisrael. Across the span of time, still waiting, we realize that Yaakov has given something greater than the telling of what the future would bring. The vision has already come to us from the very beginning, from the time of a gentle breath spreading out upon the water, and so too, from Yaakov now, the way. *Acharit Ha'yamim / the End of Days* refers to Messianic time, the time of swords turned to plowshares and spears to pruning hooks, of peace and harmony embracing all of creation. The details of that time are closed to Yaakov and he cannot speak them. He tells his children something more important, however, how to get there.

In Yaakov's emphasis on gathering together, using two different words, *he'asfu/gather yourselves as one* and *hikav'tzu/keep together*, he is offering both the vision and the way. Gathered together as one and so remaining, across all distance and difference, is a vision of what can be. In so gathering and being with each other, we live the vision now and make it real. In this way, the Slonimer Rebbe teaches that we shall bring near that time. It is the vision and the way of

Shabbos, the future made real in a single day, the End of Days lovingly held in one day.

As we remember Rev. Martin Luther King and the words of his last days, of having been to the mountaintop, awareness that he would not get there with us, he showed us the way, as did Yaakov. It is not about knowing the future, but of how to get there. The future is now, if we live it and make it real in the way of our gathering as one.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor