

Dear Chavraya,

I try not to look beyond Shabbos now, only wanting to arrive there and be in safe harbor, to be held in one day's sweet embrace. Yet, the day beyond, the beginning of a new week weighs upon me. I keep thinking about how to balance all that calls for attention from the world around us just in one day, let alone the coming week and beyond. I feel swirling within, a hint of chaos, as I think about the vigil against hate at the Wayland mosque earlier in the day, a gathering in the face of the hate mail received by that mosque last week. I think about the afternoon demonstration at a Wendy's restaurant down town to support farm workers, images coming to mind of the people I met when in Immokalee, Florida recently. The fast food chain has refused to support the needs of farm workers, buying tomatoes from the cheapest source without concern for the health and safety of workers. I think about the large interfaith gathering at the ISBCC in Roxbury later in the day.

This Shabbos is Human Rights Shabbat, a day of wholeness in which to reflect on all the brokenness in the world around us. There is so much to do, so much to repair, so many needs among people who are hurting, the earth crying out for all of the pain we have inflicted upon our mother, source of life. We can feel out of breath at times and come to feel numb. I am sure you know the feeling. When we are numb, however, we can't do anything. The challenge of Human Rights Shabbat needs to begin with a careful assessment of what we can and cannot do. With so much to do, so many needs, it is instructive that we honor the doing on Shabbos, a day when we step back from doing. We consider the need to do from a place of pause. The gift of Shabbos is its way of renewal, its reminder that at times we need to step back in order to go forward.

We need to start from a place of commitment to doing, to playing our role in the bringing of *tikkun/repair* to the world. This is the essential theme of the Slonimer Rebbe, that we each have our own unique task and purpose in this world, otherwise we wouldn't be here. We each have our own area of *tikkun* to effect in the world, a way of repair that only we can do. We are each needed to do our part in bringing the great *tikkun*. As Pete Seeger sang, "If two and two and fifty make a million, we'll see that day come round." No one is able to do it by them self, we need each other. It is the message of the deeply important teaching of Rabbi Tarfon in *Pirke Avot*, *It is not upon you to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it/lo alecha ham'lacha ligmor, v'lo atah ven chorin li'batel mimena*. No one is expected to do it all, nor should we expect that of ourselves. The great challenge, now and always, is to honestly determine what we can do and to start doing it.

It is helpful to look at what we are already doing for the sake of raising up good in the world. It may be that our own day-to-day work offers possibility for greater focus on justice. We are the ones best suited to effect change and raise awareness in the places where we already are. Many of us have a feeling, or even a passion, for one particular area of justice and peace work, and so we can see how we might do more in that area of need. It may be work for the sake of earth and climate; it may be in challenging racism. It may be in challenging anti-Semitism; seeking to house the homeless; working for the rights of workers, and

on and on. Caring for our own loved ones, giving succor and comfort to elderly parents, caring for children and helping them to be *mentchen* in the world is not to be minimized as a way of *tikkun*. Every act of kindness in interpersonal relations is the way of *tikkun*, without which all of our efforts in the great world are ultimately for naught.

It can be hard to get going, challenging to take that first step, even overwhelming, when there is so far to go. In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Vayetze*, this tension, the challenge to take the first step is seen in a simple phrase. As Yaakov sets out on his journey, fleeing from the wrath of his brother whom he has wronged, so much swirling, so much to make right, the Torah says, *va'yisa Yaakov rag'lav va'yelech/and Yaakov lifted up his feet and went*. It could simply say, *and Yaakov went*. In Yaakov's need to first lift up his feet there is recognition of how difficult that very first step can be. To begin the long journey toward peace and freedom there is need at times to push our selves. In every moment of transition, of new need and challenge, there can be a sense of new beginning. Feeling set back and set upon, as in these times, it can feel as though we've never been here before, or with so much to do how to even begin. The first step needs to be deliberate, intentional, taken with a breath of determination. And then we go, hand in hand, each offering their own way of repair, bringing of who they are to the task.

And now we come to Shabbos and we pause. I pray that all might find extra breath, that each might feel renewed in the company of others and of the *Sh'china*, God's motherly presence that surrounds, that encourages, reminding us to rest, and then, equally loving, to get going.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor