

Dear Chavraya,

In these late days of summer, as the earth offers her bounty and we delight in fresh produce, we are given equally fresh awareness of where our food comes from. With that awareness our connection to the land is renewed. There is opportunity to feel connection beyond the land itself, even to the Source of Creation, to the Life of the Universe / *Chay HaOlamim*, as God is referred to in the morning prayers. All that grows from the ground, food for body and soul, delight for eyes and palette, is a humbling reminder that we humans are but one part of Creation, all interdependent.

One of the greatest sins of civilization is unbridled consumption, taking whatever we want without thought of consequence to ourselves, to others, to the earth. Clear-cut logging, dumping of toxic wastes, gluttonous depletion of natural resources are all expressions of a self-centered satisfying of immediate appetites without regard for time and people to come. *Kashrut*, the Jewish dietary laws, are one way that Jews have traditionally been reminded that consumption has limits, that appetite alone does not determine what we eat, nor desire how we behave. It is a way of learning to live responsibly in the world, knowing the way of self-discipline and living with an awareness of limits.

The danger of living without limits, such as for us are woven through the *mitzvot*, is expressed in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Ekev*, in a familiar passage that forms the second paragraph of the *Sh'ma*. With the *Sh'ma* itself we affirm oneness, of God and of people. With the second paragraph, *V'hayah im shamo/It shall come to pass if you really listen...*, a stark choice is set before us, to live in accord with the words of unity we have just uttered or to merely pay lip service to them and live in denial. When our very lives express God's Oneness we facilitate blessing, *then I will give the rain of your land in its season—the early rain and the late rain—so that you may gather in your grain, your new wine and your oil..., you will eat of it and be satisfied*. When we live divided from each other, from the earth and from God, from that oneness that joins all, so the land cries out for the curse we bring, *there will be no rain, and the soil will not yield its produce, and you will quickly vanish from the good land that God is giving you*. It is an ancient warning that speaks to us of global consequence, climate change, drought, acid rain.

In *Parashat Ekev*, a portion of choices, the Torah speaks of consequences in the plural. Collective reality, for good and for ill, is a gathering of personal choices. Offering simple instruction for living, for wellbeing of self and of earth, the Torah speaks in the singular, addressing each one of us, *v'achalta, v'savata, u'veyrachta/you shall eat, and you shall be satisfied, and you shall bless*. This is the source for the blessings said after a meal, *birkat hamazon*. The Jewish way affirms all of Creation's gifts, encouraging us to partake and enjoy physical as well as spiritual pleasure. God says to us, *eat, es mine kind (eat, my child), and be satisfied*. But then, in pausing to bless before and after eating, we acknowledge Creation's gifts and their source. Pleading for humility, the Torah speaks further in the singular, *all that you have might increase, and then your spirit might become haughty, and you might forget God, your God*.

Of this season's simple gifts that sing of Creation's intricate web, may we partake and smile with delight, and in blessing the very Life of the Universe remember that we are all one with the earth and with each other.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor