

Dear Chavraya,

Time has run its course today and gotten ahead of me, its own teaching beyond the moment. I look out of my window into a void newly formed, so much empty space. The great tree that stood for a century or more in our neighbor's yard came down yesterday. It had rotted within and was too dangerous to leave standing, cut down with great sorrow. The high arching branches that I so loved to gaze upon for inspiration are gone now. The branches upon which birds would alight and squirrels frolic are gone. Falling snow flakes seem to stop in mid-descent, wondering where to land between sky and ground, no more branches to adorn with frozen crystals so delicate.

So too, a certain sadness with Chanukkah now past, the great menorah in the shtibl, a tree of light removed from the table, set back in its place on the mantelpiece to wait until the time comes round for its lighting next year. I find comfort in the sadness that I feel with the ending of each of our stopping points in the journey of a year. Touched by the return of the menorahs to their place, I am suffused with a familiar feeling. I realize it is the same feeling that I felt when putting away the Pesach dishes for another year, and when taking down the sukkah for another year, even in the ceasing of our saying Psalm 27 that guided us through all the months of our turning as we approached and then came through the Days of Awe. I realize in my sadness for the ending of Chanukkah that soon we shall come in our journey through time to other places of joyful pause and celebration.

It is all in how we approach the void, spaces newly opened and those of long standing, emptiness filled with the manner and way of our living in the day to day. The menorahs are put away and Chanukkah has ended, the oil long depleted, bright candles become but a few remaining drops of wax on the table. The light still shines though, once having been kindled, only to dissipate but never to disappear. The light fills the void, even the fading light of day's end, the time of now that we call *beyn ha'sh'mashot/between the suns*.

It is all in the way that we approach, the message that is held in the first word and name of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Vayigash*. And so the portion opens, Yehudah stepping forth to plead on behalf of his youngest brother, Binyamin. Binyamin, the youngest, as Yosef once was, framed by Yosef, now viceroy of Egypt, all a stratagem to see if the brothers have changed since they threw him, Yosef, into a pit and saw him then sold down to Egypt as a slave. And with such magnificence of word and spirit, Yehudah steps forth to plead, *vayigash elav yehudah/and Yehudah approached him*.

The rabbis say that *vayigash/and he approached*, in its root *nagash*, can reflect three ways of approaching, *la't'filah/to prayer*, *la'fi'yus/to reconciliation*, *la'milchamah/to war*. Another midrash immediately follows, *eyn lashon vayigash eleh lashon shalom/there is no expression of vayigash/approach, except as an expression of peace*.

It is all in the way that we approach, that we come near to fill the void. The gentle lights of Chanukkah still shine from where they danced upon the branches of the menorah, a tree of light. The great tree whose branches swayed just

beyond my window is still there in the memory of its graceful grandeur. In the way of my remembering, the void is filled with the light of what was and of what is and of what shall yet be in the turning of time. It is all in how we approach the void. As time runs its course and gets ahead of us at times, we come to Shabbos and we pause, and in pausing we catch up, filling the void with light.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor