

Dear Chavraya,

I write from Los Angeles with warm greetings, words in their essence of connection and blessing. Of blessings so deep, it has been wondrous to hold and behold our new grandson, to share in his parents' joy, to see the generations flowing from one to another. The week of the little one's birth is infused with the teaching of *Parashat B'shallach*, the portion that is his, his birth portion, perhaps some day whose chanting he shall learn as a Bar Mitzvah. It is a portion that sings of birth and becoming. The children of Israel pass through the parting of waters to become a people, as every child comes through the waters to become a person. *B'shallach* is the portion whose theme gives name to this Shabbos, the Shabbos of Song, *Shabbat Shira*. The people stand on freedom's shore, free at last, free at last, and sing a song of thanksgiving and disbelief. It is a portion of awe for the very meaning of life and of horror for the losing of life, even the life of one who would harm us. Pursued by Pharaoh after having just let them go, the children of Israel behold their tormentors drowning in the sea through which the former slaves had just passed. They do not sing at first, not yet, horrified and awe-struck before the loss of life, of bodies writhing, machines of war sinking into the depths. Angels in heaven begin to sing for joy and the Holy One said to stop, the rabbis giving voice to that moment, "how can you sing while my handiwork drowns in the sea." Amidst the song of freedom, we are reminded of the thread of life that joins us all, even the oppressor and the oppressed. How long, how long, dear God, until we truly know that we are one in your image that is one?

These are the tensions and challenges that our grandson is given this week through the Torah portion of his birth, the portion of Torah that is his. It is to sing for joy, simply and freely without restraint, and yet to know that there are times when song to be true is stopped before a note is sung, when all is held in the sounds of silence. It is the way we sing the Song at the Sea, *Shirat Ha'yam*, verses of Israel's redemption to be sung with joyful tune and of Egypt's destruction with quiet chant as undertone, the undertow of the sea closing in. It is akin to the pouring off of drops of wine at the Pesach Seder in reciting the plagues, a diminishing of joy, not a time for a full cup. We are never meant to delight at the destruction of our enemies, only to strive harder to bring the ultimate redemption, time of peace and harmony among all, of swords turned to plowshares and spears to pruning hooks, no oppressed and no oppressor.

That is the time of which I wrote in offering blessings to our grandson when telling of his birth. As I had earlier explained, he was born exactly on the line of light between day and night, Sunday turning to Monday. Of time indeterminate, the mixing of hues, grays and blues, the time between day and night is a sign of that time that is neither day nor night, of which we sing at the Seder, *karev yom asher hu lo yom v'lo layla/bring near the day that is neither day nor night...* It is *Moshiach* time, time of the Messiah, time of swords turned to plowshares, of peace, of justice, of wholeness for all. This time is called *beyn arbayim/between the evenings*, perhaps even, *between the mixings*, as of light. That time is also referred to as *between the suns/beyn ha'sh'mashot*. As I read the *parsha* on the airplane, I was startled to see that each of these terms is carried in the portion (in Ex. 16:12), terms I had never noticed in their subtlety, never having had a grandson born in

that time to point the way into text and life. Simply in passing, or not so simply, the Torah speaks of food that shall come in the evening as God's gift of sustenance, telling of that time, *beyn arbayim*. The Aramaic interpretive translation speaks of that in between time as *beyn shim'shaya*, the equivalent of *beyn ha'sh'mashot* / *between the suns*.

As we pray for our little one and for all the children of his generations, for all the children who remind us of our task, may we come to that time, no longer indeterminate, but real in its beautiful mingling of hues, touched by all the peacefulness of the setting sun, all people then to lie down in peace and unafraid. We pray that his song be true and clear in its telling of who he is, and so for each and every one. In the clarity of the song arising from his soul, so too may he know when in silence to hold all life as one, and to strive to make it so. *Az yashir/then shall he sing*, and so in joy shall we sing for him.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor