

Dear Chavraya,

I am feeling a mix of joy and sadness as we make our way through Sukkos, approaching the end of the Torah, a sense of accomplishment and yearning, nearing the end of Moses' time with us in this cycle of his Torah life. It is all held in this season that is called *z'man simchatenu/the season of our rejoicing*. Red leaves dance amid the green, waving in the breeze, a brilliant swath of orange red amid the remaining green leaves on a tree I can see through the window of my study. I just returned from gathering willow branches by the pond, their leaves to be scattered on the floor on the morning of Hoshannah Rabbah this Sunday, a reminder of the scattering of days in time if we are not careful. It is a startling call to nurture, to care for, to attend to the colors and texture of each day that we have, that our lives not be scattered, touched instead by the focused rays of inner light, our own and that of others to guide along the path. There is beauty in the leaves strewn upon the road in patterns of their own making, colorful splashes in glorious disarray.

In its earthy rootedness in nature, in the physical world, Sukkos helps us to find our way back into the world beyond ourselves from the deeply introspective journey through the *Yamim Nora'im/the Days of Awe*. Of the fragile booth of hope that gives of its meaning to these days of joy, a dwelling place on the road to the future, the great twentieth century Jewish philosopher, Franz Rosenzweig, wrote: "Thus the Feast of Booths is not only a day of rest for the people, but also the festival of the ultimate hope. It is a festival of rest only in that it breathes hope.... As the Sabbath flows back into the weekday, so this close of the spiritual year is not permitted to be an actual close but must flow back into the beginning (Star of Redemption, Holt, Rinehart, Winston, P. 321). In that way, our return on Simchas Torah to the very beginning, *B'reishit*, we become part of the ever-renewing cycle of time, holding Moses' memory as a blessing as we seek to live yet again in accord with Creation's beauty and promise.

In the way of end and beginning become as one, the vision and the way, dwelling in the sukkah reminds of our own fragility and that of earth itself and yet of our grandeur and beauty. Taking up the *lulav* and *esrog*, sensuous reminders of the beauty of nature and of the greater beauty when disparate elements are joined as one, as in the four species of palm, myrtle, willow, and magical *esrog*, all held in our hands and waved in praise of God's holy presence all around. The vision of human unity, of all joined together as one, is also the teaching of the sukkah, a sukkah of peace, *sukkat shalom*, that for all of its fragility reminds of the glorious possibility of a world not yet that is for us to create as partners of the Holy One.

That we need each other to make our way is a teaching that comes as a gift in the numbering of this year as we count by poetic tradition since Creation, 5780. Through numbers formed of letters, words emerge. In this way, the Hebrew letters that form 5780 are *Tav, Shin, Feh*. Danced around slightly in the way of *gematria/numerology*, the word *shutaf* is formed, which means *partner*, as *shutafut* is *partnership*. The Slonimer Rebbe reminds of parallel teachings, of connections made by the rabbis that join us to each other and to the Holy One as partners in Creation and its ever-unfolding possibility. In the way that Franz Rosenzweig

makes the connection between Sukkos and Shabbos, so the rabbis did long ago. Of all who observe the *mitzvah* of sukkah, the rabbis taught, *k'ilu na'aseh shutaf l'ha'kadosh baruch hu b'ma'aseh v'reishit*/it is as if they become a partner with the Holy Blessed One in the work of creation. And of Shabbos, the rabbis offered the same teaching, saying that whoever says *va'y'chulu*, the words that begin the second chapter of B'reishit and that form the beginning of the Shabbos evening Kiddush, simply in joining oneself to Creation through the saying of these words, so too one becomes a partner with God in the work of Creation.

This is the blessing with which Moses blessed us, as the very last portion of Torah begins, *v'zot ha'b'racha asher berach moshe...*/And this is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel before his death. As though reiterated to bring home the blessing, we are told just a few verses later, *Torah tzivah lanu moshe*/the teaching that Moses commanded us/*morasha k'hilat Ya'akov*/the inheritance of the community of Jacob. It is a beautiful teaching of unity, that the Torah belongs to all of us, each of us as part of the community of Jacob is an equal inheritor of Torah.

As we are partners in Torah, so we are partners in nurturing its vision and bringing to fruition the hope of Sukkos and of Shabbos, each as one on this Shabbos of *chol ha'mo'ed sukkos*, the Shabbos that comes as resting place on the journey through these festive days. As partners with God and each other, we are strengthened in our ability to hold all of the swirling emotions that come with the confluence of ends and beginnings as one. Feeling the ache of Moses' death, coming each year as the death of a beloved teacher and friend, so too we see the beauty of falling leaves in all their colorful glory, the beauty of endings that yet remind of beginnings.

Shabbat shalom and Chag same'ach,
Rabbi Victor