

Dear Chavraya,

My family came together for its annual Thanksgiving gathering at the home of one of my brothers and his family yesterday. Prior to the meal, acknowledgement was made of the painful history that serves as backdrop for such gatherings. We spoke of the brutality of America's relationship to its indigenous peoples, those on whose land we gathered, on whose land we live throughout this country. My sister-in-law then spoke with humility of all the sorrows and joys that we try to hold as one, no less on this day. She then spoke of Thanksgiving as the one day when so much of the family is able to be together, and simply for that opportunity, we humbly gave thanks.

As I looked around the room, something felt different, though I did not identify immediately just what it was. When people sat down, it became clear that there were many more young people present than older folks. We were three generations, with our oldest daughter and her family visiting from California, little ones running and playing among us. We took our annual walk once dark had settled, the bridge between the meal and dessert. I walked with my arm around oldest grandchild, Leo. We looked up at the twinkling stars and noted the absence of the moon. We spoke about the cycle of the moon and of its disappearance from sight as the old cycle ends and the new one begins. We spoke about Rosh Chodesh and of marking new cycles in time. I told how my mother, his great grandmother would make these walks and talk with his mother, her granddaughter, as we were walking now. We completed the walk quietly, my arm still around his shoulders, dessert beckoning.

As we came back into the house, I stepped back for a moment and realized what was different. Until recently, there had been four generations present, in-laws of a few of my siblings, and until two years ago, my dad. Then I suddenly realized with a start what was most different for me. I realized that I was the oldest person present. I felt a certain panic, a deep yearning for those who were absent, a sense of inadequacy, a feeling that I was unprepared and unworthy. Above, amidst the twinkling stars, the moon continues on its journey, new light continually emerging, and so too here on earth in the way of families and generations unfolding.

It is the week of *Parashat Toldot*, the Torah portion of generations, *v'eleh toldot Yitzchak/these are the generations of Yitzchak...* (Gen. 25:19). It is the week in which the second generation of our ancestors gives rise to the third generation. It is the Torah portion of my son's birth and of his Bar Mitzvah, a week to remember the rising of generations. I pause and remember those who were present then, and from then to now of journeys that continue, of those whose light twinkles down from among the stars, a reminder to look up and witness the promise of new light emerging.

A midrash serves as poignant bridge between last week's Torah portion, *Chayyei Sarah* and this week's. In a collection of teachings from "the School of Elijah" called the *Tanna d'Vei Eliyahu*, a question emerges, *when will my deeds approach the deeds of my ancestors/matai yagi'u ma'asai l'ma'asei avotai?* I find something discomfiting in the question, something almost harsh in being judged in

relation to those who came before. In his beautiful way, the Slonimer Rebbe softens the harshness, seeming to feel it as well, knowing that we need to be lifted up in our own uniqueness, our own gifts to be valued unto themselves. He offers his signature theme, emphasizing the importance of each person, the fact of our presence in this world as proof that we are needed. As he teaches in regard to many other places throughout the Torah, so he reminds us here, in *Parashat Toldot*, the portion of generations: *from the day of the creation of Adam and onward, there is to each one a unique task and purpose for the sake of repair in this world; a unique mission placed upon each one from above, and there isn't another person who is able to fulfill the mission of their fellow and repair that which their friend needs to repair....* Having emphasized each person's unique purpose in the world, the Slonimer then teaches, as though specifically for *Parashat Toldot*, *v'chen l'chol dor b'shli'chut ha'm'yuchedet shelo* and so for every generation, each with its own unique mission.

Of three generations gathered, each emerging into a new place in the turning of time, I try to feel at ease in entering the new place and role that is mine. I am ever grateful for the unique gifts of those who came before, giving thanks for their love, their words, and their deeds. As the deepest way to honor them, I trust that the eldest generation now emerging into its place will lovingly give of the ways that are uniquely of our time and place in the turning. Looking to those among the stars for guidance, my arm around Leo, we talk of light emerging, of time and generations turning. Approaching the house in the dark, Leo said, "Guide me, Zayde." Holding back tears, I said, "of course, Leo," and he trusted me.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor