

**October 9, 2009**

***Shabbat Shalom and Chag Samayach!***

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*Tonight, we will end and begin the reading of the Torah as we celebrate Simchat Torah. As I discussed with our 7th Graders and members of the Board this week, the last word of the Torah is YISRAEL (Israel), and the first word is B'RAYSHET (at the beginning of/in the beginning). If we simply look at the process of reading the Torah as moving forward towards an end point, we start from the creation of the entire earth (as part of the universe) and, throughout the Torah, focus in specifically on one people, from Abraham to Moses and, as we will read in the Torah tonight, to Joshua, who would take up Moses' mantle of leadership as the Israelites entered Canaan. While the end of the Torah is a sort of "destination," we know that the celebration of Simchat Torah brings together the end and the beginning of the cycle of reading the Torah, so that we don't stop even for a moment. We immediately move from the scene of the Israelites about to enter Canaan back to the creation of light. This helps us to regain our perspective on who we are so that we will remember that we are a part of all humanity and all of creation even as we are members of a Jewish community. Perhaps there is another meaning implicit in this immediate beginning of a new year of Torah reading as soon as it ends. As the first declaration of creation is VA-Y'HI OR, "Let there be light," the Israelites, in the last chapter of Deuteronomy, were about to experience a new beginning as they made for themselves a new home in Canaan, where their accumulated wisdom and the teachings of their heritage, TORAH, would be OR, light, to guide them throughout their history, with many opportunities for renewal in store.*

*In our own lives, we may find that, even within one particular journey, there are moments that offer new beginnings, when we feel as if there is a special light (enlightenment) that suddenly directs us to a new insight which could cause us to see our path with a fresh outlook. And even when we "return home," we may not be the same as we were when we left. In the same way, as a community, we celebrated Simchat Torah last year, and the year before. As we celebrate Simchat Torah this year, we should take a moment to recognize that we are in a different place than we were a year ago. While we have come back around to the beginning of the Torah, it may be that we have changed because our experiences over the last year have enabled us to see life in a new light. And so, as we end and begin the cycle of reading the Torah, may the light of wisdom, knowledge, experience, and hope, continue to shine on us as we find ways to begin anew along the journey of the year that is to come.*

***-- L'shalom, Rabbi Larry***