



Torah for Turbulent Times

"The Circle Game"

The cooler weather is settling upon us. Autumn leaves continue to fall and dance with colorful brushstrokes before our eyes. We can feel the seasons going “round and round.” Captive on the “carousel of time,” we go “round and round and round in the circle game.” (Joni Mitchell) This past weekend we also went round and round, as we ushered in the close of the holiday season with Simchat Torah. Many of us literally danced around our homes to the klezmer music and lyrics of *“Mitzvah gedolah lihiyot b’simcha/It’s a great deed to be in a state of joy.”* Along with this ecstatic and climactic ending to the extended holiday season, we included traditional prayers for rain, sustenance, and sustainability. Finally, we looked back “behind from where we came,” reflecting on the holidays and our lives. With gratitude we continue to go round and round in the circle game of life.

While this holiday season was like none other, we did it! We came together as an actual (not just virtual) community to pray, sing, see each other, hear the shofar, cast our crumbly sins away, shake the lulav and etrog, dwell in our humble hut, and twirl around in circles with the Torah - all in a ritual embodiment of the blessing of the sacred cycle of life. This time of year generally leaves me feeling tired from so much celebration and ready for some time out. This year I feel fulfilled and ready for some more time together, especially as we continue to live in a masked and socially distanced reality.

I share this poem in reflection upon the end, and the beginning, of our next round in the circle game. As someone wiser than me once said, “Every new beginning comes from some other beginning’s end.” (Seneca)

“When the Holidays Have Ended: A Blessing for the Return to Everyday Life” After the holidays have ended, what is there to gaze upon? And what is there to praise? When the last word is uttered and the last song is sung are we to be numbed by the ordinary? Or open to something extraordinary, still? As we have taken in the rounds of our joy, let us remember the circles of our days. And that every “Beginning,” “Ending,” and “During” contains the Power and the Glory and the Journey to return us to the greatest source we have been given: The blessed possibility of being alive. (Devon Spier)

-Rabbi Mark