



## Torah for Turbulent Times

"Transitions & Strength"

We say good-bye to the past year, even while there were likely some good memories too. Moving forward in time, the pandemic moves forward with us. We eagerly anticipate the opportunity to take the vaccine and welcome a new stage of life. What feels fresh to me as the secular calendar has changed is a new yearning for renewed resilience. In times of transition in the Torah from one book to the next, Jewish tradition provides a ritual and communal mantra to condition us for strength. Perhaps these words can also be helpful with the turn in time.

Completing the book of Genesis last Shabbat, we watched as Joseph kissed his father Jacob good-bye. In this emotional scene we witness the grief, loss, love, and separation from a loved one, all in a single kiss. 2020 gave us so much to grieve. We've endured loss, while at the same time enjoying love and family, and the strengthening of some connections too. Starting anew, we offer our own farewell kiss. Although our calendar has turned forward, the connections we've made and our experiences of the past year still remain with us. Rather than leaving permanently, they linger and lodge within our hearts. I wonder, "*What are the things and experiences of the past year that we can take into the new one in order to help strengthen us and infuse our lives with meaning?*"

Perhaps it's serendipitous or *besbert* (meant to be) that we completed a book of Torah during the same weekend that we also completed the secular year. We begin anew with a transition in Torah and time. Completing one book of Torah and beginning a new one, we move from Genesis to Exodus with the tradition and ritual of holding on! That is, upon finishing our reading of each book of the Torah, the custom is to grasp hold of the *eytz hayyim*, the tree of life, literally the name for the wooden rollers that hold our scroll together. And then, we say together, "*Hazak, Hazak v'nithazek* - Be strong, be strong, and let us strengthen each other!" Now already six days into 2021, may we hold on tightly together as a community, continue to be strong, and to strengthen each other for life.

Rabbi Mark



