



## Life's Multiplicities Reflections on *Simḥat Torah*

Simḥat Torah; literally Rejoicing of the Torah, is the last of our High Holy Day observances. It is the holiday in which we celebrate both the last reading of our Torah and at the same time the very first. It is a holiday in which we celebrate that our “master narrative,” as coined by Rabbi Michael Goldberg, our cultural story, is a cycle. At the same moment we end, we also begin. We read the last words of Deuteronomy and roll the Torah scroll to the beginning and read the Story of Creation. Simḥat Torah shows us the multiplicity of our common story.

Isn't it the same in our individual lives? Two things – or more – often happen at the same time. So often we assume that because we can only speak one word at a time that we think – or experience the world – one thought at a time. But one of the truths about life – both our internal lives and our external lives – is that a lot happens all at once. The richness of life is that most of it happens in a kind of simultaneous manner: our mind wanders in the midst of a conversation; we meet someone for the first time and they remind us of some one we've known for long time; a flood of internal memories accompanies the external handshake. And in an instant the past, the present, and the future all occupy, in some way, the same time zone.

And so, isn't life the same even when we are ill, or otherwise vulnerable? We are in the hospital facing something serious, and at the same time we are quiet in a way we have not otherwise been in a hectic life. We are in a retirement home looking at the last part of our lives, and at the same time enlivened with the possibilities of finally fulfilling life-long dreams. We are saddened by the death of a loved one, and at the same time relieved that they suffer no more. What are the simultaneous truths of your life? How do they reveal the many ways in which life is like the Torah Scroll: delicate yet resilient, filled with memory and re-examination, changing feelings and perceptions, and finally, ways in which reminiscing has both its sweetness and challenge.

Simḥat Torah celebrates the whole of Jewish life; the good, the bad, the struggles, the triumphs, the relationships that are sustained over time, the relationships that break in a moment. And every year we roll back the story to begin anew; to re-read the same words with the new eyes only experience can bring. Aren't our lives the same? We move from pain and toward relief, from

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boredom to excitement, from success to challenge; all simultaneously. And yet, just as we read one word of Torah at a time, so too do we speak of the simultaneous experience one word at a time.

It is probably one of life's true paradoxes that wisdom comes from the simultaneous moments of life: an insight in the midst of watching a movie, discussing a book or attending a concert. Truly then Simḥat Torah is a metaphor that life, at its core, is simultaneous. And like Simḥat Torah, at least once a year, we benefit when we re-roll the same story and look at it with the eyes of accumulated experience. May your simultaneous life bring you the wisdom to reflect on its vast complexity and richness.

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This Torah Reflection was written by Rabbi Eric Weiss, President and CEO of the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center. The Torah Reflections series is published by the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center, a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties. More information and healing-oriented resources can be found at [www.JewishHealingCenter.org](http://www.JewishHealingCenter.org).



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- Rabbinic care, chaplaincy, counseling and spiritual direction—at home or in hospitals, hospices, nursing homes or other care facilities
- Spiritual support groups for patients, caregivers, and the bereaved
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Whether through prayer, study materials, or simply a listening presence, the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center is here to support you during difficult times.