

Torah Thoughts Vayeilekh

5779:

Every end is also a beginning, a fact that we act out each year on Simhat Torah when, immediately after reading the final verses of the Torah, we re-scroll it and read its first verses. One year's cycle of Torah reading ends, and another begins, just as the year itself comes to an end and another takes its place.

Transitions can cause anxiety. Leaving behind the comfort of what we know for an uncertain future unnerves us. We share that with the Israelites in this week's Torah reading. They have now arrived at the Promised Land, but what will that mean? It is not only the land of Canaan that is unknown to the people; it is the future that the land holds for them. Will they be able to conquer it? Will they remain faithful to God, and God to them? In his farewell address, Moses tells the people that he suspects they are already planning to abandon God. That is why, as the Israelites end their journey through the wilderness, and Moses prepares for death, he charges his successor Joshua with the words "Be strong and resolute...the Lord Himself will go before you. He will not fail you or forsake you. He will be with you. Fear not and be not dismayed!" By stating God's loyalty so strongly, Moses helps the people deal with the fears that any transition entails. 'Things will be alright,' he is saying, 'Just trust in what got you here.'

We are starting a new year and, with it, the uncertainties of the future. We too must reassure each other that through faith and courage it will be a year of health and prosperity for our families and our community. We too must be strong and resolute as we advance into the unknown country of the year ahead. With a bit of faith, some hard work, and a whole lot of good will, we will make this new year of 5779 one of growth and connection for us all.