

Every Ending Is a New Beginning:

This Is the Blessing

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Photo: Chase, Pam's service dog, 12/25/25, at our favorite Jewish Deli

As we come to the end of our Torah cycle, I find myself most touched by grief and joy simultaneously somehow. Each of us comes to this Parashat knowing it is the final portion. This provides us with an opportunity to pause and reflect on the entirety of Torah, while excitedly looking ahead to a new year of study, learning, and spiritual growth. We also know at its completion, we will begin anew. That is the beauty of our Jewish tradition. It is a continuous, never-ending cycle, grounding us in the holy wisdom of our sacred Torah. We find ourselves at an ending, while knowing we begin anew, just as one cycle ends, another begins. This is Torah. This is life. This allows joy to be a part of our process, knowing full well as people with disability that grief and joy can and do co-exist within our lives. I hope to share with you that inextricable inter-weaving that emerges in endings and new beginnings.

Together we are reflecting on "This is the blessing," as we bear witness to the final moments of our beloved Moses' remarkable life. He generously bestows blessings upon the tribes of Israel with carefully chosen words to show each tribe that they have been seen and honored by Moses as

their witness. As we close this Torah journey, we are facing not just the death of our Prophet, we are pondering his and likely our own mortality and how that impacts the way we live. Surely, we will make mistakes, even as Moses did. Hopefully, we will live like Moses, serving God with devotion, purpose, and fidelity to our people and in our modern world bringing Disability Torah in action and advocacy.

Moses

I would like to take a moment to reflect on Moses' remarkable life because we are his ancestors and his life and faithful service to God and his people, are deeply embedded in the richness of our shared tradition.

Moses' relationship with God demonstrated how we, too, can live in intimacy with the Divine and just how richly our life will be enriched by so doing. Being in relationship with the Divine requires a vulnerability to openly communicate our fears, our doubts, our dreams and to be open to the still small voice of God. Moses grew in faithfulness (Emunah) and an unshakeable confidence in God called Bitachon(trust) (Brody, 2021, 2022, Margolius, 5784, Silverstein, 5784).

Moses' rich inner journey demonstrated courage (Ometz Lev) and as an exemplar of humility across our Holy Torah showed us how to live in relationship with the paradox of our humanity, that life is not only wholeness, but also brokenness, and the two can live in the realm of possibility (Kedar, 2025, p. 85) to move us forward. Moses knew

God's presence is in all that exists including our pain and urged each of us to know the connection that exists between me and my Creator (Rheins, 2026).

Our Sacred Torah shows Moses to be a faithful servant of God or eved ne'eman (Sacks, 5782).

BLESSINGS

Moses offered carefully chosen words to bless each of twelve tribes. His words are inspiring, uplifting, and show reverence for our Creator, carefully chosen to speak to the strengths of each leader and open their minds and spirits to growing in closer relationship with our Creator. Moses showed how to call forth God's holy presence amongst themselves, reflecting to the tribes their merit before God. Moses showed the tribes, by example, how to call for their God and how God demonstrates signs that show authority and loving care (Freeman).

The great medieval French commentator, Rashi, reflected on Moses' blessings to the twelve tribes of Israel, illuminating key themes of Israel's worthiness (merit and blessing), symbolism of encounters with the Divine that await them in lives of service, meeting their needs, and that the end of Moses' leadership becomes the beginning of Joshua's leadership, reflect a continuity within the cyclical nature of our Torah. Moses blessed the heads of each of the tribes before blessing the entire people Israel, emphasizing the Presence of the Lord, who's love for the people was evident. He emphasized the bounty open to the

collective people Israel from acting in unity to propel them forward. Moses exhorted:

Blessed be He who enlarges God!

Deuteronomy 33: 20

In so doing, Moses blessed the tribes that they may know security by executing the Lord's commands. Moses stressed that God will help you, be your refuge and support everlasting when you accept God's Torah (Freeman, Torah.com).

MISTAKES

We reflect on Moses' long life as we consider the notion of mistakes as a reason that Moses was denied entry into the Promised Land. Our Sacred Torah shows Moses to be a faithful servant of God or eved ne'eman (Sacks, 5782; Sobolofsky, 2013). We consider other ideas.

Turns out there are a LOT of commentators' opinions on why Moses was denied entry into the Promised Land.

Rashi and Nachmanides contended that Moses had struck the rock rather than speaking to it as instructed by God, indicating anger rather than trust. Rambam reflects on Moses' anger when lashing out and calling followers, "rebels". Ibn Ezra cites Moses and Aaron's inability to trust that God would answer their prayers, rather they fled from a congregation (Firestone).

Modern commentators have reflected on Moses' life and actions and have offered other explanations; none, however taken all into account of Moses' remarkable life as the

greatest leader our people has ever known, fail to explain his exclusion from the Promised Land. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks reflects on Moses as leader, citing his historical and unmatched role in our people's history, that Moses surely functioned as a leader to encourage his followers, our ancestors, to continue the works and move forward (Sacks, 5786).

Life and death are inextricably interwoven. I used to teach Medical Law & Ethics to college students and included a detailed unit on death and dying, whereby I stressed that not one of us gets out of life physically alive. For the purposes of our discussion today, how can we learn from Moses' life and death and his enduring influence on Jews around the globe today? Moses' death showed us that though we will not complete the journey- whatever it is for each one of us – may we live lives of service, compassion and care, lives that inspire others to continue the work we started. Moses' remarkable life surely inspired our ancestors to continue his work to sanctify God's holy name by each person taking behavioral action.

For the longevity of my professional career, I worked in neurorehabilitation, in part, which focuses, in part, on behavioral change. The adage: the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior was oft cited. As we reflect on Moses' life and at the end of Torah, his death, we may begin to consider the notion of completion. Moses, even at 120 years of age at his death, did not complete the journey. Moses did inspire them by continuing his journey by making their mark (Freeman, 2016).

Our ancestors, like Moses, and like us today, will and do make mistakes. Mistakes are a fundamental part of being human; an essential way we learn and grow. Moses' life and learning involved growing in relationship with Hashem across his entire lifetime. Moses demonstrated for us how we, too, can live in deeper relationship to and with our Creator (Silverstein, 5786). Moses may have stumbled, and we surely have stumbled and will continue to do so. We are human after all. We must keep going (Freeman, 2016; Kedar, 2025) so that our mis-takes (Hay, 2024) are tools for learning and growing, so that the best predictor of our behavior becomes we kept going.

May we keep God at the center of our being and our actions so that when it is we who are unable to complete the journey, our life, like Moses, can inspire others to continue what we began. We are after all in this life together. We are acting to sanctify God's holy name. We are determined to fulfill our purpose and to make manifest meaningful change in the world that allows for a more just and equitable way of living for all our fellow travelers. God does not expect us to be perfect (Freeman, 2016). Moses, even as our greatest leader, was not perfect, because he was human. Moses was determined to live his life in devoted service and faithfulness to God. He kept going. He led by example that we may do the same. Moses' defining example was to keep going, keep serving, keep the focus on God's holy presence and acting to serve God, not perfectly but with faithfulness and forward movement right to the end.

MORTALITY

We are mortal beings.

It is now time to face the end of Moses' remarkable life. Moses' death ends as he lived, imbued with vigor and an evident Divine Spark, shining forth his holy soul. We can see that God extends his Divine Mercy to Moses in death, portrayed lovingly, mercifully, and not harshly traumatic (The Union for Reform Judaism). Moses dies reassured by a loving God that the Promised Land will be given to his offspring, to the people he has led forth in forty years of journeying.

GRIEF

Moses dies on Mt. Nebo with the Promised Land in sight. God wept after giving him a gentle death, burying Moses with a loving burial himself. The midrash teaches us that the heavens and earth also wept on Moses' death. The Israelites grieved deeply according to our tradition for thirty days the loss of Moses, their remarkable leader. (Freeman, 2016, My Jewish Learning).

We see Moses' legacy continue, as Joshua steps forward to continue the work of Moses as commanded in a new beginning and in fulfilment of Moses' legacy. Author and Senior Editor of Chabad.org, Rabbi Tzvi Freeman writes extensively on the reflections of Medieval Commentator

Rashi, mining for positive connotations of Moses' legacy and shares:

We are not about the Torah. The Torah is about us.

We are called upon to accept the yoke of Torah and strive in heart and action to do good in the world as the People Israel. We are meant to understand that Torah is to be brought to our world to be revealed (Levanon).

Just yesterday at my synagogue's Yizkor Service, I reflected on the prayer of memory as it relates to the loved ones I had lost in 5786 and the loss of Moses and the impact of his legacy (Torah.com) reverberating and propelling us forward in 5787.

May God remember forever my dear ones...

and may my life always bring honor to their memory.

—Yizkor service, Gates of Repentance

Though we have reached the end of our Torah cycle, our journey, our life, continue to propel us forward, embracing a past known to us and a future unknown, we join with our people to keep learning, growing, and revealing Holy Torah in our lives and in our world (Kent). We are called to embrace that every ending is a new beginning and within that awareness (Da'at), we find continuity in our Torah. We are asked to embrace the energy of everything in our

people's story, to pause to reflect on our own life, joys and challenges alike, and on our purpose(tikkun). It is time to step forward within the momentum emerging from expanded consciousness of completing an entire cycle of Torah, to begin anew. We are invited to embrace that in every ending is a new beginning, and this is the blessing. (Kedar, Torah.com, Weiner).

"If we could grasp all of reality, from the beginning to the end of time, we would see everything as beautiful."

— Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook

CONCLUSION

Blessed be He who enlarges God!

Deuteronomy 33: 20

Since we have reached the end of the Torah, I would like to invite us to pause and reflect on all that came before for each of us on our sacred journey through this lifetime as persons with disabilities. Please take a moment to ponder at this time of transition and continuity to reflect on your journey in this HOLY moment that is NOW:

- How can we take with us the knowledge we have gained from our faithful study of Torah, our eager learning, our mis-takes, our chevruta, our holy community?
- Have we acted in accordance with our beliefs?

- Did our words match our hearts? Did we act on purpose with purpose?
- How did we traverse our own disability journey, meeting it with courage (Ometz Lev) to find meaning as Moses' life so aptly showed us?
- Have we embraced the wisdom of the Torah, integrating its meaning into our Nefesh (both soul and living being), so that we may live in alignment with its vision?
- As we take a moment to pause and reflect, are we ready to keep moving forward, ever ready to meet the unique challenges that our disability presents to us? Will we delight in a deeper relationship with Hashem?

As we move forward, may we delight in what this moment shows us of our brilliant tradition: that Judaism and we, as Jews, are a part of our ancestors, all who came before us illumine our paths forward. May we find that in this ending, we stop and reflect on the Holy man that was Moses, our most adept leader in our shared history. May we reflect on his journey as a person with disability who found his way forward in leading the Twelve Tribes, while ever growing his deep and intimate relationship with his Creator, thereby showing us how we can grow along our path -whatever the journey contains.

May we find that we know, as Moses did, that Hashem is with us every step of the way, every moment in time, contained within every joy and every challenge that accompanies our disability journey and may we be filled with peace (Rheins, 2026). May this peace, this wholeness

reflected in the completion of the Torah, propel us into a new beginning in Bereshit that we begin anew with unwavering commitment to grow in relationship with our Creator, knowing that we are loved and cherished, created b'tselem Elohim, may we stride anew to experience great new vistas in life experience and learning from our wise and holy text that is Torah.

May you feel and know the connection that exists between you and your Creator. May you feel God's presence in all that exists, in your every experience. May you be comforted in your questions, in your lived experience as a person with disabilities, in your pain, and in your willingness to step forward and expand Disability Torah for you and for all. May you find joy in your shared service.

We have come to the end of the Torah, both an ending and a beginning in the continuity of our sacred tradition. It is our custom to recite (Kent, Weiner):

Chazak chazak v'nitchazek!

Be strong, be strong and we will be strengthened.

Every ending is a beginning.

This Is the Blessing.

Ken Y'hi Ratzon,

May It Be So.

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**The late metaphysical teacher and author, Louise L. Hay taught the concept of mis-takes as opportunities for a new take. She emphasized in her modern teachings that mis-takes are how we learn and grow. Her teachings widely encouraged self-love and forgiveness as part of the healing journey.*

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About Pam

Pam(she/her) and her husband of nearly four decades, Tucker, live in Colorado with their three adult children, Emilie, Meaghan and Connor and four grandchildren, Vianne, Seraphina, Ezekiel, and Zoe. Chase, her beloved 14-year-old service dog, a West Highland White Terrier, is ever by her side and is pictured next to this article on the Disability Torah Project website, at her request.

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This is her second contribution to Disability Torah Project, and she is grateful to be included in this community of authors expanding the breadth and depth of Disability Torah. You can reach Pam at paglpointofview@outlook.com. She would love to hear from you.