

## The New Year for the Torah (October 2006)

It's my fault. The reason this issue of Temple Topics is so late is because it took me so long to submit my article. But can you really blame me? After all, the deadline for Topics was just before Rosh Hashanah. And I had all those sermons to write. And then came Yom Kippur, and all that atoning. Maybe you can find it in your hearts—having just come through the season of forgiveness—to allow me a little slack.

That's the problem with the Yamim (literally, "the Days" as in Days of Awe). They are so intensive, so time-consuming, so demanding that it is virtually impossible to focus on anything else. No doubt that is why the next holiday of Sukkot, which comes just five days after Yom Kippur, requires no thinking, just building. Torah calls it *zman simchateinu*—the season of our joy. For those of us in the synagogue world, this is the season of our joy, not because we're glad that the High Holy Days are over but because now the year really begins.

I'm convinced that Simchat Torah, the very last observance of the festival of the Sukkot season, really serves as a beginning. In ancient Israel Sukkot represented the end of the agricultural year. It was the autumn harvest. No more field-work to be done (hence the "season of our joy"). But now that the work-year is gone, what to do? How best to occupy one's time? My thinking is that this was when our ancestors turned to Torah and the beginning of the cycle of Torah reading. And for us that really does mean the season of our joy, because now we get to immerse ourselves in Torah. It's learning-time.

This month, beginning with Simchat Torah, we commence our year-long Torah repair project. Linda Coppleson, our *soferet* (scribe), will ceremonially take one of our scrolls after we have finished reading about the creation in order to start her sacred work of restoring our Torah scrolls. And then comes Adult Education: Sisterhood Study, Adult Jewish Literacy, our Sunday morning classes ("Israel—Who Land Is It?" and Adult Hebrew), and Lunch With the Rabbi all start within days after the Torah is re-rolled. Do you want to finally learn how to read Hebrew? Have you always wanted to get some perspective on Jewish history? Would you like to take one lunchtime each month to do some text study? The time is here. (Cue: shofar blast!)

With apologies to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Simchat Torah is as much the beginning of a new year as anything we know. It is truly a season to rejoice. Join us as we dedicate an entire year to Torah. "It is a Tree of Life to those who take hold of it."