

Dear Temple Sinai Family,

This may sound sacrilegious but, for me, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and its sequel, *Through the Looking Glass*, are a kind of Torah. In much the same way as we read Torah over and over again in a cycle and glean new meanings from the text as we grow and change, I have read Carroll's volumes more times than I can remember. Every time I find some new hidden treasure and another poignant message to extrapolate.

Of course, my parents first introduced me to these stories as a very young child. I was simply enthralled by the beautiful and strange illustrations by John Tenniel, coupled with the fantastical tale of a girl on an adventure in a magical world. As a teen, I dove into the Alice tales again and became curious about the myriad analyses of the text – some say it's an allegory about drug culture, others speculate that it's a political critique on colonization, and still others say it was reflective of the emerging trend of psychoanalysis. And on and on and on. I was amazed at how many scholars had offered alternate interpretations of this ostensibly simple child's tale.

In my early twenties, Ben and I read these stories aloud to one another, and again I heard and understood the words anew as recited to me by someone with whom I was falling in love. Much like Alice's journey, Ben and I were embarking on an adventure together – one with twists and turns, with challenges and successes – an adventure that would leave us forever changed.

Yet another pilgrimage to Wonderland took place when Ayalah was very young and Ben and I, once again, read these books aloud, this time to our cherished daughter. We hoped for her to see *this* world as a Wonderland, basking in its surprising beauty and inexplicable miracles. In turn, through these stories, we encouraged her to nurture the realm of her own imagination and aspired to instill in her a love of "getting lost in a good book." Similarly, we understood that Ayalah, and all young children, are on a journey of becoming. Like Alice, each child must wrestle with the concepts of right and wrong, struggle to discern what is true and what is false, and strive to find one's place in it all.

And now, as I approach the next decade of my life, I find myself, once more, longing for Wonderland. For weeks now, I have been working on constructing and bringing to life a doll house that will become Alice's cottage in Wonderland. I am building and decorating the structure and I have been collecting trinkets and miniatures to fill the interior – all Alice-themed. As I began work on this project, in an attempt to be self-aware and self-critical, I reflected on the circumstances that have led to my rekindled Alice-obsession this time around.

This winter was a challenging one for me and my family – my mom's illness (she's doing great now!) cast a shadow on every day, and I was, for perhaps the first time, forced to think about my parents' mortality. Confronting this inevitability, that our parents must one day pass, marks the absolute end of childhood. And, though Ayalah and Jonah are still young, and I hope to read the Alice stories to Jonah soon too, they are growing up so fast. I can't believe how big they are and how these early childhood years have flown by.

Then there's turning forty. Though I'm still a good eight months away from this milestone birthday, it's definitely got me thinking about the next chapter of life – one in which both my children and my parents are aging – with my parents needing more support from me and my children needing less. As I try to prepare for this next phase, I find myself yearning for a return to innocence – to a world of fantasy. A Wonderland. This life, this reality, is beautiful and complicated and wonderful and I wouldn't want to trade one for the other, but to preserve both realms – of reality and fantasy – is a gift and a treasure. I am grateful for the life lessons I have learned from *Alice in Wonderland*, and I will continue to read her story. For me, these stories are like Torah, at every age, always revealing new insights and truths. So I leave you with this: Do you have a book that is like Torah for you? If so, which book is it and what are the lessons you have gleaned from it throughout your lifetime? I look forward to hearing from you.

B'Shira, in song,

*Cantor Micah Morgovsky*