

## Entering Cheshvan 5781

Rabbi Hazzan Rachel Hersh

Welcome to the Hebrew month of Cheshvan (October 18/19) and we begin again. Now the holidays are over, the Torah's in our aron (ark) are dressed back in their blue coverings for the year, and their white holiday clothes are put away until next Rosh HaShana. (May we gather in person next year!) The symbolism is clear: it's time to return to the regular rhythm of the everyday, with no holidays to distract us from appreciating, from accepting, from challenging what's before us. In Cheshvan we learn to appreciate the quieter moment-by-moment passing of time, which somehow ultimately adds up to a lifetime.

When the pandemic began, I felt especially grateful for the chance to walk in the woods near our home, usually with our dog, and notice the slow arrival of spring. The trees started out mostly bare, then fattened up, pregnant with new leaves and buds, and then the slow rebirth of the woods began, first in baby-light-green, then deepening into a full adult color as the summer arrived.

Now those woods have changed color again, turning mostly gold, a little red and more and more brown with each passing day. Cheshvan is here and the big energy of the holiday season has now softened to an every-day pace. There is time to notice this cycle of life and death as it appears in the theater of the forest. Soon enough, the trees will be bare again.

The poet Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman writes (translated from the original Yiddish) in her poem "Harbstlied" - "Harvest Song":

See it's autumn, and what was green has now turned brown  
See it's autumn, and what had blossomed is now gone  
And I who thought that spring would last forever  
I hold eternity in my hand

Oho, falling leaves!  
Oho, flying days!  
Oho, how will I wander  
When the fog clouds my way

We associate the spring with new life, with possibility, with opportunity. And autumn? Well . . . don't we all wish that spring would last forever? Yet we know that it can't. We know that nothing alive lasts forever. As if knowing our human impulse to hold on, perhaps a little too tightly in the best of times, Nature delivers a spectacular grand finale to the cycle, lighting the way forward with gold variations. The poem concludes:

Why do you need to wait for springtime  
When autumn offers baskets full of gold?

With our Sukkot verses of Ecclesiastes still echoing in our ears, we begin now at the end. We'll have moments to celebrate and moments to mourn. We watch the leaves complete their cycle, "one season following another, laden with happiness and tears"<sup>1</sup>, knowing that spring will come again and in the meantime, remembering that the cycle is eternal. Chodesh Tov.

---

<sup>1</sup> from "Sunrise Sunset" in Fiddler on the Roof by Jerry Bock