Losing (and Finding) What Matters Most

By Pam Morris, Early Learning Center director

Education as a career path and life goal began for me in 1992 with my graduation with a BS in Psychology from Binghamton University. That fall, I entered my master's program in Early Childhood Education at the same university, different school and I never looked back! With many relevant degrees, over 3 decades of hands-on experience, Early Childhood Education is my passion, my raison d'etre, my tachlit, my reason for being.

I have to tell you about my ring.

When I graduated high school, my mom and dad gave me a pearl ring — one of those gifts that isn't really about the object at all, but about everything it holds. Every time I looked down at my hand, I saw them. Their pride. Their hope for who I'd become. Thirty-some years later, that ring has been through everything with me — including, this past week, going missing.

I tore my house apart. I retraced every step. I sat with that particular ache of losing something irreplaceable, something that can't simply be repurchased or replaced, because its value was never really about the pearl.

And then, this same week, our community moved through Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah — two holidays that, on the surface, seem to be about endings. Shemini Atzeret is when we shift the language of our prayers, adding *Mashiv HaRuach U'Morid HaGeshem* — "He causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall" — into the Amidah. We stop asking for dew, the marker of the dry season, and start asking for rain. It's a small change in wording, but it's really an announcement: one season has ended, and we are ready — even eager — for the next one to begin.

Then comes Simchat Torah, the holiday of pure, unrestrained joy, where we finish reading the very last words of the Torah... and without so much as a breath in between, we roll the scroll all the way back to the beginning and start again. *Bereshit*. In the beginning.

There is no closing chapter in Judaism that isn't also an opening one.

I didn't find my ring right away. But sitting with that loss during a week built entirely around endings-that-are-really-beginnings taught me something I want to pass along to you, because it's the exact same lesson we teach your children every single day in our classrooms.

A scribble is not a failure — it's a first draft. When a toddler stacks three blocks and watches them tumble, we don't treat that as an ending. We clap. We say "try again!" We know that the tower falling down is simply the Torah scroll being rolled back to the beginning — necessary, joyful, and full of promise. Early childhood is, at its core, a curriculum of new beginnings. A child spills the milk and we teach clean-up, not shame. A friendship has a hard day and we teach repair, not permanence. A skill isn't mastered yet, and we are adamant about emphasizing "yet."

We ask our littlest learners to trust that endings are doorways. And this week, the universe asked the same of me.

I did, eventually, find my ring — tucked in the seam of my front seat or maybe it was in my purse - both I'd checked three times before. But honestly? I'm not sure the finding was even the point. The point was the practice: sitting in the discomfort of "this is gone," and choosing to believe that something new — or something returned — was still possible. That's *emunah*, faith, in its most everyday, unglamorous form. Not faith that everything works out exactly as planned, but faith that we keep turning the scroll back to page one anyway.

So as the wind shifts and the rains (so fitting that the beginning of this week brought that to Chandler) begin, and as our own children close one small chapter after another this week — a hard goodbye at drop-off, a puzzle piece that wouldn't fit, a nap that didn't quite happen — let's remember to greet each ending the way we greet Simchat Torah: with dancing, not dread. With "again!" instead of "over."

Whatever you're searching for this week — a lost ring, a lost patience, a lost sense of where you're headed — I hope it turns up right where you least expect it. And if it doesn't, not yet, may you find the grace to roll the scroll back to the beginning anyway, and start reading again like it's the first time.

#ShabbatShalom