



THE BLOGS

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Peaks and Plateaus: Heshvan's Call to Strength



Hanna Taieb photography

On Simchat Torah, women of all denominations around the world danced with the Torah, twirled in circles, and recited the *aliyah* blessings with confidence. This is no longer exceptional. In a sense, we have arrived.

And yet, our tradition teaches us that upon reaching a milestone accomplishment, our highest blessing is that of continued ascent: “*Chazak chazak ve’nit’chazek!*” “Strong, strong, and may we be strengthened.” But how do we live from one peak to the next, building on each boost of new momentum? For women, is the fond memory of that one annual exception enough to carry us through the remaining 364 days of the year?

In the rhythm of the Jewish calendar, we have transitioned from Simchat Torah’s apex to the “post-*chagim*” slump. The High Holidays and Sukkot are behind us and an autumnal chill creeps in. The month that follows has been coined “Mar” (“bitter”) Heshvan, alluding to the shortage of holidays in it. However, the optimists among us have reframed the nickname, turning the two letters around to form “RaM” Heshvan, meaning “strong,” or “ascendent.” Behind this clever wordplay, I see an opportunity to utilize the energy of “peak” moments, in this very moment of plateau.

Recently I rejoiced at the headlines about the first all-women mission to space. We had reached equality in the galaxies; “We did it!” Yet, what about here on Earth? We are justified in celebrating historic triumphs; still, we must build on hopeful energy to empower change in the realm of the everyday. Instead of pointing to these moments of success as license for complacency, we use them as fuel for further positive change.

For instance, one may compare the joy of women dancing with the Torah in synagogues worldwide against the absurdity of the restrictions women face at the Western Wall. This week Women of the Wall will greet the New Month of Heshvan at the Kotel – where the matter of a Torah scroll is distinctly more precarious. No Torah scrolls are available on the women’s side of the Western Wall Plaza, and security guards have regularly confiscated any scrolls brought in by visitors. “You should not have to smuggle in a Torah scroll,” said Eden, the head of the Western Wall security force, to me at the last Rosh Hodesh gathering. I agree wholeheartedly – especially when I was allowed to dance with one just last week in synagogue.