

Shabbat Parashat B'reishit  
Begin with the End in Mind

As we celebrated Sim<sup>h</sup>at Torah last Monday night and Tuesday, we completed the cycle of our annual Torah reading and then began it yet again. It is almost as if we are celebrating an ending with a new beginning. We are not given a chance to linger on the conclusion. Continuity and new beginnings are the theme and focus of the festival. It is a day of renewal. Our tradition teaches that there are “*shiv'im panim laTorah*/seventy faces to the Torah,” which instructs us that no matter how many times we read the same Torah text, there is always something new for us to learn because we can see it in a new way each and every time. So, each year, I think about HOW I want to begin my year of relearning the Torah. This year, I have borrowed a phrase from educational parlance for my thinking about the lessons of the Torah: “Begin with the end in mind.”

There are many methodologies behind curriculum design. One philosophy and methodology that we have adopted in Judaic Studies at VTT is called “Backwards Design Theory.” What this theory instructs an educator to do is to think about and lay out the goals and outcomes that one wants to achieve and then plan the teaching and learning experiences, texts, activities...etc. that will facilitate the achievement of those goals and outcomes. It truly is, “beginning with the end in mind.”

I came up with this mantra for my thinking about my Torah learning this year when I revisited *parashat* B'reishit, this week's Torah portion (with the Creation story and the story of Cain and Abel), on Sim<sup>h</sup>at Torah earlier this week. The number of universal and central human values (all human beings equally being created in God's image, the need to be “our brother's keeper,” our obligation to care for and protect the Earth, among several others) that we learn from this week's *parasha* is staggering. It is almost as if the Torah itself begins with the end in mind! If all human beings were to take to heart and work toward living their lives according to the values taught in this week's Torah portion, we would achieve an experience of life on this Earth that would surpass anything we have yet achieved.

As we consider the Torah portion this week, it would be of tremendous benefit to us all to think about our more transcendent goals (not “I would like to get a raise or learn how to \_\_\_\_), goals that are based on the values we learn from our tradition and the human experience and see what we can do to make them come to fruition. A life lived striving toward these goals is an end worth reaching for, and there is no better time to begin the process than today! Let us all begin with valuable and meaningful ends in mind as we once again start our Shabbat cycle of reading from the Torah.

Shabbat Shalom!