



Simcha :שמחה

By Pam Morris, Early Learning Center director

Joy. Happiness. Felicity. Exhilaration. These are words to describe emotions that we might not think to feel this year, only one year since the Simchat Torah massacre and the start to the atrocities that have continued since Oct. 7.

On Thursday, Oct. 24, at sundown, Simchat Torah began. The name of the holiday has happiness right there, front and center: Joy of Torah. We celebrate having finished reading the Torah - each week on Shabbat, synagogues around the world read a portion; some read the entire *parasha* in order and some only read sections of each *parasha*. Regardless of the tradition, it is the same section each week in every synagogue no matter where the synagogue is located or the denomination (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, etc.) And then we begin reading again. In fact, the last letter in the Torah is a *lamed* and the first is a *bet*. Put together, in that order, it spells: *lev* which means heart. (Note: The *bet* is often pronounced with a V sound.) The Torah is the heart of the Jewish people and the Torah, and everything about it, brings us joy.

But when we think back, just one year ago, all of the joy, the happiness is missing. How do we dance with the Torah and celebrate, when over 1,200 people were massacred, when 250 people were taken hostage and 101 are still not home. Where is that joy?

I am reminded of this thought. When people talk about the atrocities of the Holocaust, how do we answer and respond to the sadness? How do we continue on after Oct. 7?

The answer is, because if we don't, they win. If we admit defeat, if we don't dance with the Torah, if we don't celebrate our Judaism and proclaim it to the world, they win. If we stop sending our children to Jewish schools or Jewish youth groups, they win. If we hide our *mezuzah*, our *hamsa*, our *chai*, they win.

That is not OK. It is our job to celebrate who we are and the protesters, the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) supporters, the people who shout, "From the River to



the Sea,” the college professors who stand against Israel and the Jewish students on their campus, they need to take a step back. As American citizens, they have the right to peacefully protest; that does not mean blocking traffic or blockading buildings or keeping students from their classrooms or threatening violence (see, “from the river to the sea” again). As American citizens, it is our responsibility to stand up for injustices. But it is also our job to see who stands with America. Who fights for us. It is our job to use our education and learn the history of the war. We live in a great nation. We are afforded incredible opportunities to learn and grow; to defend and dissent.

And it is our responsibility to learn and be knowledgeable. We can’t dismiss the atrocities that occurred, even when international organizations do. We can’t forget that children are still being held hostage, if they are still alive. We can’t forget that Holocaust survivors, who helped build Israel, the land as we know it today, were kidnapped and killed. We can’t forget that in 1948 the Arabs who lived in the British Mandate of Palestine, were offered their own land; their own country. And they, along with the other Arab nations surrounding what is now Israel, declined, vehemently.

But neither can we let the distress caused by all of this diminish our joy. Diminish our resolve. Diminish our pride.

I stand with Israel. I celebrate my Judaism. I wear my Jewish star and chai with pride. I am joyous about who I am and I teach my children to be this way as well.

#Shabbat Shalom.