

in the beginning, always

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You didn't want the story to end, but it had to. After spending much time with the characters, the story built up to a perfect ending and now you've closed the book and are sitting on the couch with a smile and that fulfilled feeling vibrating through your insides.

It's that feeling we all love after finishing a good book.

And, with the conclusion of the Torah this week, it's that feeling that we, well, just don't have. The last portion of the Torah ends with the blessings Moses gives to the twelve tribes, followed by his uneventful death. The last portion of the Torah has no crash and bang closing. There are no bottom-lines, no hints to a sequel, and certainly no clear motive to please the reader. It is not the culmination of an intense plot or the answers to mysterious questions.

It is in no way the type of ending a book is supposed to have.

John Grisham and Shakespeare are in a frenzy.

To the Torah's potentially disappointed readers, the cozy feeling inside upon reading its final chapter will only exist with a mental shift. Yes, we can all find the meaning in the Torah's last words. We can analyze and explain why it concludes the way it does. Not one letter in the Torah lacks relevance.

But to search for such meaning often goes hand in hand with the notion that Torah is like all other books, and we carry with us the same expectations.

But the Torah is not a book. The only thing the Torah has in common with a novel is the form it comes in. It's presented to us enclosed in a cover, pages, and a binding.

But it's rather misleading.

The Torah, unlike any other written word, is timeless. With something that is not bound by time, each microscopic element of its existence holds within it both the beginning and end. There is no need to turn the pages, because the essence — everything you need to know and see — is right there, wherever you happen to be looking.

Once we internalize this reality, the Torah's true nature becomes something to really celebrate.

On Simchat Torah, a day dedicated to celebrating the gift that Torah is, we dance in a circle. Just like with the Torah, a circle has no beginning and end. Each point is just as significant as the next. You can't find the beginning, you can't find the end. People join the dancing circle wherever they can break in, and they're just as happy and alive as any other dancer in the circle.

And that's just the way Torah is. You can open up to any page and that's where everything is. You didn't miss the beginning. You don't need to understand the climax, for there is no one point where it exists. The beauty, the lessons, the timeless wisdom — it's wherever you came in.

The first Parsha of Torah is entitled "In the beginning." One would assume, then, that the name of the last Torah portion would refer to some sort of closing, an end. But no such reference exists.

The message is clear.

In a sense, the opening title for the first portion is a title for the whole Torah.

When it comes to Torah, it's all just one opening. Wherever you're coming from, wherever you are, wherever you're going — it's all just beginning. It's one big circle. The world is round, and so are our lives.

In this world, we don't believe in endings. Endings are for books.

When it comes to the Torah, we must throw away our notions of those things that normally sit on our book shelf. This is

not an author and reader reality. When it comes to the Torah, there is a world and a journeyer. The Torah is the prism into which we view and experience this life. Its insight and lessons are eternal, like the curves in a circle, which go on and on.

With the understanding of the Torah's never-ending relevance and insight, let's not look for the plot, the interesting points that get us involved. Let's dance wherever we jump in, and, no matter what page, see the beauty, significance, and cause for celebration.

It's nice to know that wherever you find your relationship with Torah, there is a beginning, a journey, more beginnings, and absolutely no end.

So, although we may not close the book, it seems that the Torah has a message that gives us that warm fuzzy feeling inside after all.

While we realign our approach to the Torah, and its non-book status becomes clear, here's an interesting fact to consider: Although a novel it may not be, the Torah is at the top of bestseller lists all over the world.

Turns out we're all looking for a little more than just a good read.