

“TELL ME A STORY”

The Bible begins not with a law but with a story. On Rosh Hashana, the portion of the Torah we read tells a story. The Talmud informs us that in difficult times the people would gather to hear the rabbis recount *aggadot* - legends and tales of our tradition.

What makes stories so powerful? The children's writer Phillip Pullman put it this way: “‘Thou Shalt Not’ might reach the head but it takes ‘Once upon a time’ to reach the heart.” All of Jewish history is an unparalleled story, beginning in a lonely conviction of truth, and carrying through centuries, across the earth, centered on one tiny spot to which a beleaguered people finally returns.

There are old stories, new stories and -- best of all -- old stories that become new again. When we hear old stories with a new twist, a novel interpretation, a sudden insight, we realize that Abraham's journey is for all time and that Hannah's prayer echoes our own. As the old Latin proverb insists: “Change the names and the story is about you.”

Who has not been blessed to see the upturned face of a child, in eager expectation, insist “tell me a story!” We have marvelous tales to tell of miracles, of faith, of failures, of redemption, stories with an end and still unfinished stories. May this New Year grant us new versions of old stories, and may they be tales of kindness and of peace.