

Drash – Pesach 7&8

Chag sameach, and hope everyone is keeping safe and well.

And you shall count for yourselves, from the morrow of the rest day from the day you bring the omer as a wave offering seven weeks; they shall be complete.

טוּ וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמּוֹחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת
מִיּוֹם הַבְּיָאָה אֶת־עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה
שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָעוֹת תְּמִימַת תְּהֵי יָנָה:

Vayikra 23:15

There will be time, there will be time..... (TS Eliot)

Between Pesach and Shavuot we are commanded to begin to count upwards. From the second day of Passover we are to begin counting seven weeks — 49 days.

What are the bookends of this period? The bookends are agricultural and spiritual. At the start of this period we bring a grain offering, called an “omer.” Fifty days later, at the end of the period, on the holiday of Shavuot, we bring another grain offering. At the start of this period, we are slaves, with a slave mentality. At the end of this period, we are called a nation, we have bookended our story from Exodus from Egypt.

So, what happens in between these bookends? A sense of anticipation, excitement. It’s not just about the harvesting, or the acts of moving – it’s also about the experience of counting, the experience of anticipation, excitement for the future, of marking time.

But this year! Marking time and the power of time is ever present in our new lives. How can we look away from the power of this new time – there is too much time, too little time, not enough time in our new world order.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes about the Omer, *“Time is not a series of moments traced on the face of a watch, always moving yet always the same. Instead it is a journey with a starting point and a destination, a story with a beginning, middle and end. Each moment has a meaning, which can only be grasped if we understand where we have come from and where we are going to. This is time not as it is in nature but as it is in history.”*

But this year! We are counting, counting. Counting the numbers that change every day, remembering those numbers are not numbers but people with whole worlds, counting the cases, counting the metres we stand apart, counting the beds, counting the healthcare workers, counting the quiet acts of kindness, counting the teddybears in the windows, counting the numbers...

But unlike the Omer, we don’t know how or when our counting will end. What are we counting for? What are we counting to?

Arundhati Roy writes *Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. we can walk through lightly, ..., ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.*

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes *There are two possible things that might happen once this pandemic is over. Possibility one is the very real possibility that the world will simply go back to normal, and nothing will change. It will be as if it never happened. Maybe we'll remember it, once a year. That's all. And then, Hegel will be proved right when he said "the one thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history". We take exactly the opposite view. Ba'avur zeh: History exists so that we may learn from it. History exists so that we can avoid repeating it. That is what we went through all these sorrows for, so that we would be changed thereby, and that is what has to happen after this terrible pandemic.*

Throughout our history, we have deeply engaged with the Sefirat Ha'Omer period, and incorporated other events and meanings and dimensions into this period. We have imbued it with new meanings, as well as new festivals. This year in particular takes on a new consciousness, and an offering to look at this period with new eyes. We can't yet know how or when we will look back on this Omer period and what personal meanings we will engage with. Each person has their own way of counting, their own meanings and stories that they need to honour as well.

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/counting-the-solitude/> provides us with one offering - "counting the quarantine" – the authors begin the omer count with a meditation and an offering up gratitude for the things that they find make their days count, that makes their day meaningful in quarantine.

Feelings of grief and despair and confusion are real and valid. Counting up to an uncertain end and an unknowing is beyond difficult. But we just continue to count, as it's what we do, and maybe all we can do.

Chag sameach

*<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/counting-the-solitude/>

This drash is taken from many different sources – particularly myjewishlearning.com articles

+ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/sefirat-ha-omer-time-as-text/>