
Torah Portion: Exodus 12: 21-32

Min Hametzar

Music by Noah Aronson
Psalm 118, vs. 5 and 21

*Min hametzar karati yah
Anneini vamerchav yah
Od'cha ki anitani
vat'hi-li lishua*

In distress I called on the Divine;
God answered me and brought me relief.
I praise You, for You have answered me,
and have become my deliverance.

מִן־הַמֶּצֵר קָרָאתִי יְהוָה
עֲנֵנִי בְּמִרְחַב יְהוָה
אוֹדֶךָ כִּי עָנִיתָנִי
וַתְּהִי־לִי לִישׁוּעָה

Counting Up, Cultivating the Soul

Omer Blessing, p.306 in Mishkan Tefilah (Weekdays/Festivals).
*the counting of the Omer begins Thursday evening of April 6 (tonight!) through May 25 (Shavuot).

From the day on which you bring the omer of elevation offering—the day after the Sabbath—you shall count off seven weeks. They must be complete: you must count until the day after the seventh week—fifty days; then you shall bring and offering of new grain to Adonai. (Leviticus 23: 15-16)

In the kabbalistic tradition...purification is achieved through daily contemplation of the seven lower s'firot, which as Lawrence Kushner and Nehemiah Polen explain, constitute seven 'dimensions of the divine psyche':

1. **Chesed**, love, means unlimited expansion and inclusiveness.
2. **G'vurah**, rigor, means the setting of boundaries.
3. **Tiferet**, beauty, means balance or harmony.
4. **Netzach**, victory, means commitment, eternity, and showing up.
5. **Hod**, splendor, means the reverberation that comes from making definitions, as these definitions ripple outward throughout our perception of the world.
6. **Yesod**, foundation, means the joy of creation, the pleasure that is the foundational moment in every project
7. **Malchut**, kingdom, means receptivity to take in the blessing that is given.

An example, Day 39: Netzach Sh'b'Yesod – Endurance of Commitment (David Eber, ritualwell.com)

Judaism is full of examples of rededication and renewal. For example, Tshuvah is a process by which a person can make amends for missing the mark and can return to the right path...Often, when we take on a new commitment, we expect rapid progress or change within ourselves. For example, a person commits to themselves that they are going to give up smoking, or become a vegetarian, or go to the gym every day. We often try to do these changes cold turkey, suddenly going from being an omnivore to being a vegan. It is not surprising then that more often than not, we fail to live up to these grand gestures.

We can learn a lesson here from the Mussar Movement, a Jewish ethical, educational, and cultural movement started in the 19th century in Lithuania, about a more effective way to make a change. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe writes in his contemporary Mussar classic the Alei Shur, "A person who is at the beginning of their path in worshiping God expects a very rapid advance: if only they will be strong, and pray every prayer with superb intention, they will be able to repair their character traits one by one... how great is their disappointment when they discover that change doesn't work like that!"

In Parashat Vayechi, in Genesis 48:22, there appears the word "bow," as in a bow and arrow. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, also known as the Kotzker Rebbe (a hasidic rabbi who lived from 1787–1859), writes, "Why is prayer like a bow? Just like a bow, the more a person draws the bowstring to themselves, the further the arrow will fly." The lesson here is that just as we get better at shooting a bow and arrow through practice, so too with prayer, and with making a change in our lives. Change is more oft achieved through repeated and gradual actions, rather than through grand pronouncements.

Netzach sh'b'Yesod, endurance of commitment, means that we need a dedication to practice and to communities of practice. Through the implementation of thoughtful and achievable goals and steps to reach them, little by little, we can reach our ultimate destination. We need patience with ourselves to meet our commitments and that takes endurance and dedication. Mussar Practice Suggestion: Take time today or this week to think about a goal you have been wanting to achieve. Set aside some time to think about the small and concrete steps you can take to get there, and how others can support you.

The omer is brought from barley flour. Barley, however, is not a primary food of man, but food for animals. The omer, then, represents merely physical existence...only on the fiftieth day, after struggling to purification and freedom while counting the days and weeks; only on the day that commemorates the giving of the Torah, does Israel approach God's altar with wheat bread—which is designed for man.
(Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch)

Just as all the crops are ripening during these days [of counting], so too is the life of man revealed [during this time]. For all of it is but an allusion to the way of the inner life.
(Sefat Emet)

Just as a bride is given time to prepare for her wedding day by adorning herself in jewels, so too the Jewish people were given the Omer period to ready themselves to receive the Torah (Rabbi Karyn Kedar on the Sefat Emet, Omer: A Counting).

Making each day count is a valuable lesson which adopting the practice of counting the Omer reinforces. Counting each of the days of the Omer reminds us that all of our days are numbered, and it is our responsibility to make each day count. The deliberate way in which the Torah numbers the days of Sarah's life, "one hundred years and twenty years and seven years" signifies both the fullness of her days and the significance of each and every day. We count the Omer in a similarly careful and focused manner in order to help us recognize the completeness of these days and of each day.
(Carol Ochs, <http://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/introduction-counting-omer>)

Dayeinu

Traditional

אלו הוציאנו ממצרים, דיינו

Ilu hotzianu miMitzrayim: dayeinu

Had You only freed us from Egypt
This would have been enough – dayeinu!

אלו נתן לנו את השבת, דיינו.

Ilu natan-lanu et hashabbat: dayeinu

Had you only given us the gift of Shabbat,
This would have been enough – dayeinu!

אלו נתן לנו את השבת, דיינו.

Ilu natan-lanu et haTorah: dayeinu

Had you only given us the gift of Torah,
This would have been enough – dayeinu!