



Parshah Emor – April 30, 2021 – 18 Iyyar, 5781

Dear TBE Friends and Family,

For the Jewish people, the second night of Pesach kicked off an elaborate communal countdown (or, more accurately, “count up”). Starting that night and continuing daily for precisely seven weeks, we mark each day our progress towards the festival of Shavuot, anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Sinai.

The majority of *sefirat ha-Omer* (the counting of the days), as this interval is known in Hebrew, is observed as a time of somber anticipation. For in ancient times it coincided with the ripening of the wheat crop, upon which the sustenance of the community depended, and until the harvest was complete there was no guarantee of food security in the months ahead. But by slightly after the mid-point in the grain’s development, the likelihood of a successful harvest was markedly increased and so the atmosphere surrounding the count became more optimistic.

This point of transition, associated mystically with the end of a plague among the students of Rabbi Akiva, is marked in the Jewish world with the holiday of Lag baOmer (literally, “Day 33 in the Counting of the Omer”). From that day, tradition dictates that some of the funereal customs associated with the first part of the Omer period – prohibitions on cutting one’s hair or shaving, scheduling happy events and musical performances – be set aside as we prepare to again embrace a world characterized by light and hope.

Lag baOmer was observed on Thursday night and Friday of this week, and while the joy of its celebration was darkened by the tragedy at Har Meron in Israel on the festival eve, which claimed the lives of at least 45 celebrants – the worst civilian tragedy in Israel’s modern history – its arrival nevertheless marks an important turning point in our own mood as a community.

On Tuesday of this past week, the Temple Beth-El Board of Directors, which for months had been discussing the timeframe and procedures by which to embark



upon the resumption of in-person activities, settled upon a basic framework that now allows us to begin scheduling such gatherings on a limited and, for now, somewhat experimental basis. Over the next few weeks, we will be announcing a series of ritual, cultural and social opportunities that will again bring members of the TBE community together face-to-face (albeit, masked, distanced and without food or drink).

For those who, as yet, do not feel comfortable gathering in-person or whose personal circumstances make this unsafe, fear not. We are committed to maintaining full access to our programming for those who will be joining us from a distance. Indeed, the pandemic has heightened all of our awareness of just how valuable and meaningful such virtual connections can be and sensitized us to the needs of those for whom in-person gatherings have long presented a challenge.

For those chomping at the bit to resume a full calendar of in-person activities and eager to assign Zoom gatherings their place on the ash heap of history, I ask your forbearance if the pace of our re-opening is at times slower than that which you would prefer. There are innumerable complexities to operating in the current environment – practical, social, hygienic and of course halachic – and our goal is to accomplish this transition smoothly, with as few bumps, missteps or course-reversals as circumstances allow.

As a rabbi who has led this congregation only through the medium of a screen, I am very excited at the prospect of soon being able to view at least some of your faces directly very soon and would like to express my gratitude – dare I say, our gratitude – to the Board for all the research, hard work and thoughtful effort that went into making this possible.

To whet your appetite for the increased joy and vibrancy that a hybrid gathering promises, I invite everyone to join us **this evening** (Fri, April 30 at 7 p.m.) and **tomorrow morning** (Sat, May 1 at 10 a.m.) as we mark the **bat mitzvah of Audrey Greene** (daughter of Jon and Jill Greene) with Shabbat services that she and her closest family will be attending in-person. Others are encouraged to join via Zoom using this special link



(<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87192443486?pwd=SFJZVU9OTlc4VzJ5QlVqcDI0aVdrZz09> , Meeting id: 871 9244 3486, PW: mitzvah).

We extend to Audrey her family our congratulations on reaching this joyous milestone – *Mazal tov!*

Shabbat shalom,

-- Rabbi Rachel Safman