

Words of Torah: “Making Every day Count.” By Rabbi Rick Rheins

This week’s Torah portion, *Emor* (Leviticus 21:1-24:23), includes the *mitzvah* of counting the *Omer*. Out of context, it is a rather strange and antiquated ritual. We are commanded to count the harvesting of the barley harvest from Passover until Shavuot. Specifically, the ritual is to count seven weeks of the harvest and at the conclusion we will celebrate the “Festival of Weeks” that is called *Shavuot*. Here is the text:

⁹ Adonai spoke to Moses, saying: ¹⁰ Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving to you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the first sheaf of your harvest to the *Kohein*. ¹¹ He shall elevate the sheaf before Adonai for acceptance in your behalf; the *Kohein* shall elevate it on the day after the sabbath. ¹⁵ And from the day on which you bring the sheaf of elevation offering -- the day after the sabbath -- you shall count off seven weeks. They must be complete: ¹⁶ you must count until the day after the seventh week -- fifty days; then you shall bring an offering of new grain to Adonai. ²¹ On that same day you shall hold a celebration; it shall be a sacred occasion for you; you shall not work at your occupations. This is a law for all time in all your settlements, throughout the ages. ²² And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I Adonai am your God. (Leviticus 23:9-11; 15-16; 21-22)

I’d like to draw our attention to two interesting parts of the text. First, we are instructed to bring the sheaf of barley harvest each day for seven consecutive weeks. Second, we are commanded to remember the poor and the stranger during our time of harvest. Indeed, we are reminded of the previously given *mitzvah* (Leviticus 19:9-10) not to harvest our entire fields. Rather, we must leave the edges and the gleanings for the poor and the strangers---the most vulnerable in our society.

This ancient ritual then has two powerful messages. First, make every day count. Or, to put it another way: “Make every day count.” That is not to say we are commanded to fill our “to do” list and strain ourselves to the breaking point. Rather, we are to consider our sense of purpose, meaning and significance every day. Each day is yet another opportunity to make a positive difference. Ideally, we will be able to answer positively in our moments of self-reflection: “What did I learn today? What did I teach today? Did I laugh? Did I smile? Did I console? Did I give thanks? Did I enjoy God’s gift of life?” True, there are times of stress and heartache that challenge our *joie de vivre*, the joy of life. But even during the most difficult of times, we can still feel appreciation and inspiration from the sensitive care and support we receive from friends, family and community.

In addition, this ritual of counting the *omer* concludes with a reminder us to attend to the needs of those who are most vulnerable. In effect, how can we truly “enjoy” our harvest and the bounty of our blessings when we know that others are suffering? Indeed, the most frequently repeated *mitzvah* in the Torah is the commandment for us to be kind and generous to the poor, the orphan, the widow and the stranger. Of all people, the Jewish people know what it is like to be poor and to be strangers in a strange land. The

measure of our compassion, our righteousness and our humanity is in direct correlation to our actions to those in need.

The traditional blessing for counting the *omer* is:

Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha'Olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tizivanu al sefirat ha'omer.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who makes us holy through sacred actions and who has commanded us to count the *omer*.

This Thursday is the 33rd day of the counting, *Lag B'Omer*. Jewish calendars include a day to day counting. And yet, beyond the ritual and beyond the tradition is the essence of our Jewish spirit. And that *Yiddishe neshamah* urges us to make every day count!

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Rick Rheins

PS.

This Friday night we have two services: a "Traditional" Shabbat service at 6:00pm (that Rabbi Susan and I will lead), and a "Experience Shabbat" service at 7:00pm (which will be led by Cantor Nesis and Dan Yolles).

On Shabbat morning, the service begins at 9:00am. I hope to see you at services!