

Counting the Days

During Passover, the regular cycle of Torah readings is paused and we read special selections for each day of the Festival. On the 1st Day of Passover (Thursday, April 9) we read from Exodus 12, which tells of the fateful final night in Egypt when the 10th plague passed over our homes and we began our flight to freedom. On the 2nd Day of Passover, the reading includes Leviticus 23:15-16, which commands us to count the harvest of barley every day from Passover to Shavuot:

*From the day on which you bring the **omer** (a sheaf of the barley harvest), as an 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 an offering of new grain to Adonai.*

A complete list of the special readings during Passover can be found in a *Chumash* (Torah commentary) and, of course, on-line! But let's take a closer look at the reading that concerns the counting of the *omer*. This ancient ritual is especially significant for every generation but all the more so in our current crisis. Since the counting goes on for 49 days, we note that it extends far beyond the Biblically ordained 7 days of Passover (note that some in the Diaspora communities add an 8th day). It is also worth noting that counting the *omer* connects two of the three Biblical Festivals. Passover and Shavuot (The Festival of "Weeks") are linked through the

daily counting. And most germane to our struggle during the COVID-19 crisis, we have all adopted the habit of counting the days until we, too, can be fully free again.

Judaism has long embraced the concept of making every day count. In the 90th Psalm we read:

¹⁰ The span of our life is seventy years, or, given the strength, eighty years; but the best of them are trouble and sorrow. They pass by speedily, and we are in darkness. - - - ¹² Teach us to count our days rightly, that we may obtain a wise heart (Psalm 90:10-12).

Our ancestors taught that even though a person might have a life expectancy of 70 years, or given good health, 80 or more, it is not the length of our days that matters. Rather, it is how we make each and every day count.

On Passover we celebrate our freedom from slavery. On Shavuot we celebrate the gift of Torah and acquiring a sense of meaning, purpose, and sacred values. May this time of our quarantine not be consumed with frustration and anxiety. Rather, let us infuse each day with significance. Let us count each day as yet another opportunity to learn and grow in greater appreciation for the blessings in our life and for the blessed people who we miss and can't wait to see and embrace once again.

The blessings for counting the *omer* can be found in our Reform prayerbook, *Mishkan T'filah*, on page 570. Consider making it a part of your daily ritual along with the recitation of the *Sh'ma* and other prayers. In these

transformative days, exercising our spiritual muscles will help us survive and even become stronger than ever before.

Susan joins me in wish you and your loved ones a *Chag Pesach Sameiach*, a sweet Passover filled with joy, meaning, and God's blessings.