

Transforming Loss into Love: Counting the Omer in Reverse!

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By now, many of us have tasted the sweetness of Rav's Grater Omer Challenge by counting in solidarity the fullness of the seven weeks

between Passover and the Feast of Weeks. (Even though I ran out of favorite Grater's flavors of the month, we still managed to make time count!) This journey from subjugation to redemption is a powerful global expression of Jewish peoplehood that yearns to embrace the renewal of one side of the year - but what about the other side?

For those who see patterns in time, have you noticed that there are seven weeks between Tisha B'Av and Rosh Hashanah as well? These 49 days between the spiritual nadir of our year, and the apex of its renewal, mirror the 49 days of the Omer between Pesach and Shavuot. Now more than ever, I truly see with new eyes this pattern within a practice as articulated by my teacher, Reb Zalman Schacter-Shalomi, z"l, who taught that in the spring we move from liberation (Pesach) to revelation (Shavuot), whereas in the summer Tisha B'Av calls on each of us to refocus and reveal what remains buried deep in darkness (revelation) by traversing a seven week journey to Rosh Hashanah that holds out the promise of opening wide the gateways of *teshuvah* as spiritual renewal (liberation). This process of counting Omer in reverse in this summer/fall journey mirrors our spring journey in reverse: we count time again to return to our beginnings and renew them as in ancient days.

Many of us have become familiar with the charts and applications that make the Omer count doable, and we have learning (are learning or have learned) how to refocus on seven spiritual qualia

that are shared between the human and the divine on the journey to our encounter. These spiritual and ethical qualia, aka *middot*, are also referred to oftentimes as the seven "lower" spheres of consciousness, aka *sefirot*, namely, those channels through which the divine flow is felt and is modulated into different forms. As white light is revealed through a prism to contain all of the colors of the rainbow, so too the divine unity is refracted and revealed through this prism to contain these seven colors, these seven qualities, in which we too partake. This is seen as many love to wear Reb Zalman's Rainbow tallit which has these seven spheres as seven bands of color. Imagine what our lives might look like if we wore these bands of heartmind-awareness on our sleeves!?

Remember that Tisha B'Av falls this year on Monday night August 12th and Tuesday, August 13th. Soon we shall be entering together the first of the seven weeks between Tisha B'Av and the Days of Awe. In our first week, we will start by refocusing and scouring for traces of the indwelling divine feminine Presence (*malchut*) - so we might ask: where are those holy sparks with us, within us, among us and those yet to be discovered? As we open ourselves to rediscover this indwelling divine feminine presence that surrounds us always, we also notice that this coincides with the first of the seven weeks of consolation that will be reflected in the *Haftarat of Consolation* from Isaiah. After facing brokenness on Tisha B'Av, now we open ourselves to healing, to comfort, to finding out what is the balm each of us need in our wounded places as the Days of Awe approach.

By now, we are aware that the spring Omer count begins with a week of Lovingkindness (*Chesed*), and then we work our way all the way to the immanent divine Presence (*Malchut*). This reverse summer Omer count begins with a week of the immanent divine

Presence (*Malchut*), and then work our way climbing back up the ladder to Lovingkindness (*Chesed*):

WEEK 1: **Malchut – Sovereignty**. In practice: rising to do what we have been appointed by God to do.

WEEK 2: **Yesod – Foundation**. In practice: the moral commitment that is the foundation for human social life.

WEEK 3: **Hod – Splendor**. In practice: pursuing peace in every situation.

WEEK 4: **Netzach – Endurance**. In practice: discerning what is of enduring importance in life.

WEEK 5: **Tiferet – Glory**. In practice: acting without ulterior motives.

WEEK 6: **Gevurah – Integrity**. In practice: the personal resolve to make necessary personal sacrifices without faltering.

WEEK 7: **Chesed – Lovingkindness**. In practice: the ability to love others in a way that enables them to draw close to the Divine.

This is an opportunity once again to make time count and ask myself honestly, just what do I need to do this week to begin preparing myself for renewing my journey into the New Year marked by Rosh Hashanah? What do I need to cultivate in my heart of hearts, what do I need to feel? What do I need to ruminate and reflect on? What would best feed my soul and uplift my spirit? What do I need – what do you need; what do we all need – to do and feel and think and be during these next 49 days in order to reach the new year with an open heartmind that is open to be renewed and transformed? As we gather in solidarity with Beth Jacob for Tisha B'Av services together at Beth Abraham, let us make time count and renew our spirit in the process.