

THE OXFORD SYNAGOGUE-CENTRE

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

May 2019

Iyar 5779

SHABBAT TIMES

🕒 Parasha - 🕒 Candle Lighting
🕒 Shabbat ends (Maariv & Havdalah)
For service times see page 3

10 & 11 May – 6 Iyar

🕒 Kedoshim

🕒 5:14 – 🕒 6:04

17 & 18 May – 13 Iyar

🕒 Emor

🕒 5:10 – 🕒 6:01

24 & 25 May – 20 Iyar

🕒 Behar

🕒 5:07 – 🕒 5:59

31 May/1 June – 27 Iyar

🕒 Bechukotai

🕒 5:06 – 🕒 5:57

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Pesach is now behind us. We have changed the kitchen and the dishes back over to the year-round mode, packed away the haggadot, folded up and stored the trestle tables.

So what's left? Mere memories?

There is an old Yiddish adage that translates roughly as follows: "Do not say Passover has passed us over, rather say another Pesach has been added to our life." In the original the world is actually *tzukekumen*, a word which we sometimes used pejoratively but which literally means, "it has been contributed and added."

If we move on from a powerful experience such as this eight-day festival without our lives having been altered and changed as humans, we have indeed allowed the yom tov to pass us over. Every life event must leave an indelible impression, not just on our memory but also on the person we become as a result.

As we move from Pesach to Shavuot, we are involved in a daily countdown of 49 days or seven weeks. But if we pay close attention to the wording of this Counting of the Omer, it is actually a count-up, as we begin with Day One and end with Day Forty-Nine on Erev Shavuot.

For this period is not just about passing time and mounting excitement towards the next milestone in the calendar. It is a time for intense personal preparation for Receiving the Torah anew, which involves deep and detailed character refinement. We need to refine each facet of our personality and improve how we interact with those around us. The word *Sefirah*, which refers to the

counting of the Omer, also means to purify and polish.

As we go about this process, we have to ensure that it is cumulative, that we build on the achievements of the previous days. It is not about just dealing with specific aspects of our personality and then moving on. It is about building, growing and elevating ourselves progressively more until we are indeed ready to accept the Torah anew.

This is why the Omer count does not make use of ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd... 48th, 49th). Instead we count each day the total of achievements thus far on the road to Shavuot. It is Day One, Day Two... Day Forty-Eight and Day Forty-Nine as we build on the accomplishments of the previous days and weeks.

Let us build ourselves, grow ourselves, elevate ourselves and refine ourselves so that by the time Shavuot arrives on 6 Sivan (this year Sunday 9 June) we stand ready to face Mount Sinai, truly changed.

Happy counting!

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin

FROM THE REBBETZIN

I walked to shul alone today. Most of the family who came for Pesach have returned to their own homes. Our house looks almost back to normal. Most of the furniture is back where it belongs. Mattresses are back in storage. Linen has been washed and put away. There are still some stray toys and books. The highchair is still in the dining room and the shtender is still in our bedroom. But mostly the house looks put together. It is quiet. For supper I only need to cook one chicken, and still have leftovers.

It was a blessed two weeks. A house full of talking, singing and laughing. So although I miss them all so much now I feel so much richer from the infusion of their visit.

Grateful that they took the time and made the effort to spend Pesach with us.

Grateful that I got to know each of them a little better.

Grateful to Hashem for each of them.

And grateful too for the others who couldn't come home to us this year.

So although I walked to shul alone today, my head and heart are full. My house is echoing the love and laughter. And I am thanking Hashem profusely.

Have a good month

Rivky

DVAR TORAH**HOW 49 AND 49 EQUAL 49**

by Mendel Adelman (chabad.org)

Here are a few (paraphrased) statements for you to contrast:

Statement A: "The Jews in Egypt were on the 49th level of impurity." (One step away from the very bottom, the 50th level of impurity.)

Statement B: "The Jews were on the 49th level of holiness when they got the Torah." (One step away from the very top, the 50th level of holiness.)

Statement C: The 49 days of Sefirat HaOmer (Counting of the Omer) help us traverse those 49 levels so that we will be ready to accept the Torah. Each day of the Omer, we work to refine one character trait and go up a level, until 49 days later, we are ready to receive the Torah.

Okay, now for some simple math.

The Jews started on level -49, and 49 days later they were at +49, the 49th level of holiness, right?

How far is -49 from 49?

I'll give you some time. Okay, time's up.

The correct answer is 98. The 49th level of holiness is 98 levels higher than the 49th level of impurity.

So it should have taken the Jews 98 days to get to the level of holiness required to be ready to accept the Torah. At the time of the Giving of the Torah, which was only 49 days from when they left Egypt, they should have been at level zero! How did they make it to +49 in only half the time?

The answer is, quite simply, they made it up two levels every day. How did they do that? Well, instead of destroying negative character traits and then rebuilding new, positive traits, which would be a two day process, they actually transformed the negative character traits themselves into positive ones—a one day process.

So what does that mean for me? How does all this math affect my life?

What it means is that we need to rework our understanding of negative character traits. Let's take the trait of anger. Anger is really just passion that has not been channeled properly. How negative it is depends on the circumstances: what triggered it, and what actions does it cause you to take? Imagine getting indignant when an injustice is done in front of you, and standing up for the oppressed because of that emotional response. Doesn't seem like such a terrible character trait now, does it?

The same is true of every character trait. There are no bad character traits. There are only badly channeled ones.

So, each day of the Omer, instead of trying to create entirely new emotions and traits, try to figure out where those emotions already exist. Then, re-channel them to where they are really supposed to go.

And, 49 days later, you will be ready to accept the Torah.

(Based on the Netivot Shalom, Parshat Emor.)

COUNTING THE OMER: 49-DAY PROGRAM FOR CHANGE

by Dr. Lisa Aiken, Ph.D (aish.com)

Every small step we take to become better has an effect on everyone around us.

How many psychologists does it take to change a light bulb?

Only one. But the light bulb has to really want to change.

Lots of people hate change. Actually, they love change, but only if it is others who are changing to make life more comfortable for the person who doesn't want to change. Many of us want our boss to change, our spouse to change, our kids to change, our teachers to change... the only one we don't think needs to change is us!

As a psychologist, part of my job is to help people to realize that the only person they can definitely change to be the way they want is themselves. Judaism teaches us that the entire reason we are here is to change! The Almighty created all of us imperfect and our job is to change to become better and better. If we want the world to be a better place, it starts with us. Every small step we take to become better has an effect on everyone around us.

Every year, we get an incredible step-by-step program for how to change our lives during the seven weeks between the holidays of Passover and Shavuot. We all have good and bad character traits that continually affect us and those around us. Kabbalah tells us that there are seven main character traits and we have the ability to develop them in ourselves. Each day between Passover and Shavuot, we

count another day of the Omer. Each day has a special spiritual energy that enables us to work on one important aspect of our character that is especially accessible to us that day. We take a few minutes each day putting one angle of a trait into practice with ourselves, with other people, and in our relationship with God.

Altogether, we do 49 steps with each emphasizing a different trait that can help us to become kinder, to be more self-disciplined and have proper boundaries, and to live life more meaningfully. At the end of those 49 days, we are on our way to being noticeably better people.

The first character trait that we work on is kindness. The first day of the Omer we can devote time to doing something kind for ourselves. For example, lots of people think negatively about themselves. During the course of a day they might think, "I'm not pretty," or "I'm not smart," or "I can't do that," or "People don't like me." You can start to change your life for the better by being kind to yourself. Notice when you are having negative thoughts and substitute them with positive ones instead. For example, instead of "Things never work out the way I want," you can think, "I am good at _____. When I put my energy and effort into that, things usually work out well." Or, when you think "Nobody cares about me," substitute, "These people do care about me..."

Next, think about a kind deed that you would like to do for others and do it! Simply having nice thoughts about what you would like to do does not make you into a kind person. Actually doing things

does! Give someone a compliment, visit a sick person in the hospital, make a phone call or visit someone who is lonely, help a child with his homework, spend a few hours working in a soup kitchen. Judaism teaches us that each kind deed that we do transforms us into a kinder person and can make a difference in someone else's life.

Finally, do one kind deed for your Creator. He doesn't need anything from us, but the entire purpose for which He created the world is to be good to us. When we live meaningfully, it gives Him the greatest pleasure, so to speak. Choose one thing that He would like you to do. For example, make a gratitude list and tell Him that you appreciate the talents, friends, opportunities, or gifts that He has given you. Noticing that you have received good things instead of only expecting what you don't have is something that research on happiness has shown will make you a happier person. Showing appreciation to the One who makes it all possible and verbalizing thanks to Him is a great way to do this.

It is said, "The journey of 1,000 miles starts with one small step." During the Omer, you can take 49 meaningful steps on a journey that can change your life for the better.

SERVICE TIMES

SHACHARIT (A.M.)

Sunday & Public Holidays	8:00
<i>04/06 (Rosh Chodesh): 7:00 a.m.</i>	
Monday to Friday	7:15
Shabbat & Festivals	9:00

MINCHA AND MAARIV (P.M.)

Sunday to Thursday	5:15
Friday	5:20

MAZALTOV

We wish a hearty Mazal Tov to:

BIRTHS

- Shmuel & Shoshy and Rabbi & Rivky Chaikin on the birth of a son and grandson in Florida.

BIRTHDAYS

- Hadassah Kobrin on her 97th birthday on the 7th May.

- Adrian Gore on his 55th birthday on the 16th May.

MARRIAGES

- Naomi Schmidt on the marriage of her granddaughter Alexa Jess Schmidt to Jake Axelrod.

REFUAH SHLEIMA

We wish a Speedy recovery to:

- Wilfred Ringo
- Nita Kotzen

BEREAVEMENTS

- We wish long life to Saul Rothschild and Rene Danziger on the death of their father, Michael Rothschild

May Hashem comfort them and their families among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem and grant them long life.



PURCHASE A LEAF ON OUR "SIMCHA TREE"

On the occasion of Tu Bishvat to mark a happy event in your family
Cost of each leaf is R 540.00 - For details please contact the office

SPONSOR A BROCHA

at the Shul on the occasion of a personal or family Simcha, to commemorate a Yartzeit, birthday or anniversary.

For details and bookings contact Lee at the Shul office

**OXFORD'S HALL OF REMEMBRANCE**

The plaques in the Hall of Remembrance record the names and the date of death of departed loved ones. The lights on the plaques are lit on the Yartzeit and also whenever Yizkor is recited. A special Hazkara memorial prayer is also recited during Yizkor.

Cost of a plaque is R720 for the first plaque ordered, R540 for subsequent plaques

