



Counting in the Time of Corona

Sometimes ancient practices lend themselves to renewed meaning. From the second night of Passover until the night before Shavuot traditional Jews add a prayer in order to “count the omer”. The significance of counting the Omer is to mark the 50 days that the Israelites travelled the desert from Egypt to Sinai. It also marks the wave offering of the Temple on the second day of Passover. The wave offering was a measure of flour made from the first sheaves of barley grain that had been reaped.

This 3,000 year old tradition speaks to me in a different way during this particular time. In fact, instead of keeping track of each day, I seem to have lost track of time. Is it Monday or Tuesday? Wait, no its Wednesday. The other day, I asked my wife, “*How long have we been shuttered in our home?*” A few weeks? A month. It is hard to remember exactly when. And then I shudder a bit. Is this the new normal? How long are we going to wear face masks when we go out? Are we going to abandon shaking hands? Are we going to avoid large crowds? How quickly we are to adapt. The question remains, how quickly we will re-adapt when all of this is “over”. Perhaps it is the uncertainty of it all that puts us in this twilight zone of not knowing where we are in time.

So we must apply a modicum of discipline. We can't let one day flow carelessly into the next. Our old routine is disrupted. But have we created new routines? It is all too easy to put off things because tomorrow will be more of the same.

I have to think that our ancestors were up against something very similar. For hundreds of years they lived a life of predictability and definition. As slaves they had very little choice in the matter. With freedom came disruption. A new way of looking at things, a new way of defining life's experience, and accepting the responsibilities that freedom required. Those first 50 days had to be ones of enormous transition. Wandering aimlessly in the desert, their minds played tricks on them. They were often gripped with fear. Day one. Day two. Day three... “Moses” they cried out, “we were better off in Egypt!” “Moses, when will we reach our destination?” Day four... Day five...

And yet, despite their fear, uncertainty, and discomfort with desert life, each day brought a change in their disposition. The people began to understand that their lives had value. That their destiny was in their hands and not in the hands of a capricious taskmaster. They learned, in essence, that every day was a gift. And each day needed to be acknowledged with gratitude. And each day needed to count.

So, let's have at it, shall we? Let's count. Yes, our lives are different than a month ago. And not what we would ideally want. There are too many who are hurting...they have lost their jobs, have loved ones who are ill, are suffering from loneliness. But if we are going to make our way through the desert, we must find purpose. And perhaps that purpose is both about how we care about ourselves, and how we care about each other.

How then can we use this time to our advantage to make each day count?

A quick search on the internet will give you an endless possibility of ideas. Hobbies, classes, tv shows, books, and so forth. What remains is for us to decide what we want to do. But more than “doing” we should use this time for a bit of soul searching. We will all emerge a bit kinder, a bit more centered and appreciative if we use this time of uncertainty to embrace values that are certain. Friendship. Love. Community. Faith. Learning. For it is in our ability to embrace these values that we will give meaning to our lives, and by helping others, we will add meaning to their lives as well.

We all matter. Our lives can and do count for something. The Bible teaches us, “***Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of Wisdom***”.

Let the counting begin today.