

# Weekly Teaching

*April 28, 2017*

On the second day of Passover we began to count the Omer; the seven weeks from our Exodus from Egypt until we received our Torah at Mount Sinai.

While the Omer marked the “time bridge” between the first harvests of barley that were brought to the Jerusalem Temple as an offering to God, and then seven weeks later the harvests of the “first fruits” which were offered in Thanksgiving, the tradition primarily perceives that the Omer is not a time to focus on physical growth, rather a time to focus on internal growth.

Each day during the Omer we are to perceive ourselves as marching from Egypt on our way to Mount Sinai in order to receive God’s laws.

During this journey, we wish to internally make ourselves worthy of God’s gift of Torah.

Common rabbinic commentary notes that while we might each experience physical freedom in our lives we might still find ourselves enslaved by spiritual limitations that often are self-enforced.

Only by actively seeking internal rectification by which to truly free ourselves are we then able to completely receive Torah in our lives.

An effective starting point can be the “Golden Rule;” to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

According to tradition, 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva’s students died from a plague during the Omer; the theological explanation offered was that they died because they failed to live by the most important principle of Torah; the Golden Rule.

These disciples of the great Rabbi Akiva should have known even better than most the absolute need to respect others as they wished to be respected, and yet they failed to treat each other with mutual respect.

So, according to rabbinic tradition, Rabbi Akiva’s students died because they had lived their lives denying the principle that every human being is equally created in the image of God, therefore God denied their ability to live.

When we fail to respect others, we begin a walk upon the slippery slope of life by which we can end up in a place of forgetting God, and moving from a posture of love to a position of hate.

Rabbinic dogma asserts that what God primarily wants from us is that we should love others and always treat them with dignity.

Generosity of spirit goes hand in hand with generosity of resources.

When we withhold love and kindness, we withhold the essence of our humanity for which God created us.

The Omer becomes another major prompt in our lives:

- Who needs our love?
- Who needs our kindness?
- Who do we need to reconcile ourselves with; family, friends, community, etc., etc.?

The Hebrew word for Egypt is Mitzrayim; literally meaning "Narrowness".

As we march away from the aspects of our lives that are spiritually narrow, let's arrive at Mount Sinai and receive our Torah with our arms thrown as wide as possible in order to embrace all of God's children as lovingly and as effectively as possible.

It's this posture of loving far-flung open arms that God also will best embrace and bless our own lives.

Shabbat Shalom,

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