

WHAT ARE YOU COUNTING RIGHT NOW?

*What counts? Who is counting? Why might this matter? What does this have to do with ritual?*

Teach us to number our days that we may cultivate a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90:12)  
*What questions does this familiar text raise for you?*

*Do you have the practice of Counting the Omer? If yes, what meaning does it have for you?*

1. "Seven weeks shall you count for yourself": Deut: 16:19 I might think that bet-din (is being exhorted to do the counting); it is, therefore, written (Vayikra 22:15) "And you shall count for yourselves" — each individual (is exhorted to do the counting). ( Sifrei Devarim 136)
2. "The struggle between the priests and the forerunners of the rabbis over when to start the countdown to Shavuot was probably connected to the rabbinic assertion that Shavuot was not only the Festival of the First fruits but also the festival of the giving of the Torah. Once the rabbis identified the two moments –the moment of celebrating the wheat harvest and the moment of receiving the Torah—they gave new significance to the period of the 49 days....Sometime during the next seven centuries, the 49 days took on the tone of a limited moderating mourning. Except for the two new moons that come during the 49 days (Iyar and Sivan) and for Lag B'Omer (the 33<sup>rd</sup> day of the Omer) it was prohibited to have weddings, play musical instruments or to get haircuts. When and why this tone of mourning was adopted is not clear." (Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Seasons of Our Joy)
3. Likkutei Ezrot Moadei Hashem, Omer and Shavuot  
 Each day of the Omer period is associated with a different aspect of the Sefirot. And on that day everything which everyone in the whole world is talking about is purely an expression of the particular aspect with which that day is associated. A person with understanding can hear and recognize this if he pays attention to what people are saying (182).
4. Today 27th day of the Omer (3 weeks and 6 days)  
**Yesod sheb'Netzah—Bonding within Endurance** (or Connection within Endurance/Victory/Persistence).
- 5 Making each day count is a valuable lesson which adopting the practice of counting the Omer reinforces. Counting each of the days of the Omer reminds us that all of our days are numbered, and it is our responsibility to make each day count. The deliberate way in which the Torah numbers the days of Sarah's life, "one hundred years and twenty years and seven years" signifies both the fullness of her days and the significance of each and every day. We count the Omer in a similarly careful and focused manner in order to help us recognize the completeness of these days and of each day. We also learn from the years of wandering in the desert and from the

individual struggles represented in the stories of our heroes and heroines that waiting itself can be a sacred activity, an opportunity for reflection and trust. Although the goal of the count may be the encounter with God at Sinai, we take meaning from the journey each step of the way. From Carol Ochs, "Introduction to Counting the Omer", <https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/introduction-counting-omer>

*Now we segway to the broader question of ritual. Why does ritual matter?*

Lots of attention – The Power of Ritual Casper ter Kuile

6. From the Introduction by Dacher Keltner

"People feel the absence of community. Studies find that the average citizen of the US and likely of the world is lonelier than ever before. People have fewer friends... the technologies many of us greeted with such enthusiasm a decade ago are now proving not to be the utopian digital new world of connecting but a different kind of new world defined by anxiety, loneliness, endlessly comparing oneself to others... As a professor of psychology I teach the science of happiness at UC Berkeley and beyond to hundreds of thousands of people in on line courses... Over the twenty years of this engagement I have been asked one key question: ... how might I find deeper happiness? The science points to an answer: Find more community. Deepen your connection with others. Find rituals to organize your life. It will bring greater happiness, greater joy and even add ten years to your life expectancy." (page x)

7. Ritual makes things sacred. It sets them apart. It sanctifies them by announcing and calling attention to their specialness.... Ritual is an occasion when one takes the chaos within the world and within oneself and pours it into a vessel that gives it shape and gives it order and power and form.

8. Rituals provide structure to navigate times of change, stress, and uncertainty, allowing individuals to process complex emotions; they strengthen community ties, solidify family structures, and connect individuals to their heritage. Rituals of transition (life cycle rituals) define shifts in social roles (e.g., child to adult, single to married), providing necessary closure for past stages and preparation for new ones, These ceremonies help individuals find deeper meaning in their lives, turning what might be seen as routine existence into moments of reflection and reverence

9. How transitions from one life stage to another work? The Bridges' Transition Model, developed by [William Bridges](#), explains the human, psychological journey people take when facing external change. Change is an event (My young adult children have left the nest, or I fell and now need a cane); transition is the internal psychological process people go through to adapt to that change. There are three stages; 1. Endings, Losing, and Letting Go (acknowledging the past); 2. the Neutral Zone (the confusing, uncertain middle); and 3. New Beginnings (embracing the future). Rituals can help us move through the first and second stage to get to New Beginnings.

Moments That Matter: Marking Transitions in Midlife and Beyond Rabbi  
Laura Geller and Rabbi Beth Lieberman

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<https://momentsthatmatterbook.com/>