

Rabbi Zamore's Message for May, 2014

We may think that we live on one calendar, but we human beings actually live on numerous different types of calendars. We mark time by the “secular” - Gregorian calendar, the school calendar, our work schedules, our vacations, the seasons, the civil holidays and, of course, our Jewish calendar. This list does not even include the separate calendars of sports and activities for each member of our household. It also does not take into account the rhythm of personal experience by which we measure time – birthdays, anniversaries, yahrzeits, days to camp, days since we last saw a loved one, days until we finish a treatment or medicine, days or years until we start or finish the goals which define our lives. Our calendars propel us forward and delve into our memories all at the same time.

This season adds one more calendar to the mix as we Count the Omer, the days between Passover and Shavuot. The former marks our Exodus from Egypt and slavery, while the latter marks the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. Counting the days in between these two major holidays links them theologically. Passover celebrates our redemption by God; Shavuot celebrates God’s revelation of God’s law to us, God’s people. Our freedom, therefore, becomes purposeful. In our modern American society, we often mistake freedom for anarchy or doing whatever we want without limits or responsibility.

However, the Jewish point of view on our redemption is that true freedom allows us willingly and freely to bind ourselves to purposeful action. God loved us by freeing us and giving us the law. We love God by using our freedom to bind ourselves to that law and live it.

The Counting of the Omer also has an agricultural dimension. Passover marks the barley harvest and Shavuot the wheat harvest. At the time of the Ancient Temple in Jerusalem sacrifices were offered from the first fruits of these crops. An Omer, a sheave of grain, was the measurement used for grain at the time of the Temple. Today we count from the second day of Passover for 49 days or seven weeks. This brings us to Shavuot.

Our personal calendars become the mosaic on which the seemingly desperate schedules of time come together. All of the markings on our personal calendars should reflect what literally counts to us. This period of Counting the Omer challenges us to consider what really matters. How do we use the blessing of our freedom? What are the priorities in our lives? To what purpose do we bind ourselves? As we communally move towards Sinai, I hope you and your family will consider these questions and find satisfying answers.

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Mary L. Zamore