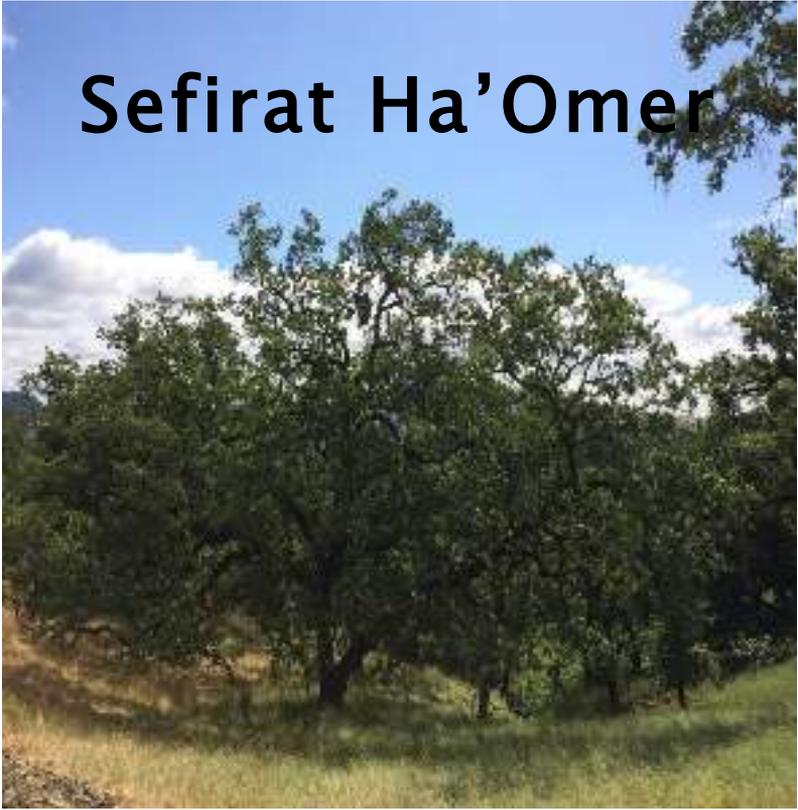


Sefirat Ha'Omer



**A 49-day Practice
Kehilla Community Synagogue**

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art by Nicole Raisin Stern

We're Free. Now What?

The traditional narrative for this time of year is that each of us has just been freed from some narrow place, whether we know it or not. We begin to act free - we use our new freedom to look at ourselves and the world in new ways, by seeking and receiving deeper truths about who we are and who we can be.

We use the next 49 nights and days to align ourselves with different attributes of holiness, so that we can become available to receive revelation - new insights and new learning on how to be and do.

Our counting is mapped onto the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, a symbolic representation of the flow of Divine Energy /Life Force into the world, according to the mystical traditions of Judaism. There are ten “sefirot” - attributes/energies/aspects. The upper three sefirot - Keter, Chochmah and Binah - are not included in this practice. They are beyond it, in a more mystery-filled realm.

The seven lower sefirot map out our path. Each week of the seven weeks we focus on one sefirah - beginning with Chesed, and then moving to Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Malchut/Shechina. And *within* each week, each day of the seven days we focus on one sefirah, in the same order.

In this way, each day holds two attributes - that of the week, and that of the day. We say that the day's attribute is “in” the week's attribute, for example, Netzach in Tiferet, which is the day of Netzach within the week of Tiferet. In this way we move through the 49 days. Or, more simply:

- Each week of the Omer focuses on a specific attribute (*sefira*) of holiness.

- Each day focuses on a sub-aspect of the attribute of the week.

The Practice

It's customary to count the omer in the evening, after sundown. You may want to make an omer calendar (there are many examples online) to help you track the days visually.

After sundown we recite:

(Traditional) Baruch ata Adonai Eloheynu melech ha-olam asher kid'shanu b-mitz'votav v-tzivanu ahl s'firat ha-omer.

בְּרִיךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַיִךְ,
וְצִוָּנוּ עַל סְפִירַת הָעֹמֶר.

(Feminized) Aht brucha Shechina eloheynu chey ha-olamim asher kid'shanu b-mitz'voteyha v-tziv'tanu ahl s'firat ha-omer.

We bless the Source of time and space that summons us to holy action and instructs us on the counting of the omer.

Today is the _____ day of the Omer, which is _____ weeks and _____ days of the Omer.

The First Week: Chesed

by Howard Hamburger

This first week focuses on *Chesed*. Everything truly generative begins with *Chesed*. It is impossible to fully describe the word “*Chesed*” (or any of the *sefirot*). There are endless depths to *Chesed*; I can only write from my current understanding. I will focus on *Chesed* as a human attribute to be cultivated and deepened.

Here is my working definition:

For the next 7 days, we’ll think of *Chesed* as unconditional love and grace, expressed in acts of lovingkindness, without desire or expectation for reward. *Chesed* has an abundant and expansive feel to it.

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expectation for reward. Chesed has an abundant and expansive feel to it.

Week 1 Day 1: Chesed she'b'Chesed

Today is 1 day of the Omer

lovingkindness within lovingkindness

Tonight, I hold the intention to open-heartedly look at when I am able to feel and express and receive pure, unconditional love; lovingkindness where nothing is required or expected in return. No one has to deserve my lovingkindness in order to receive it. I want to willingly and wholeheartedly act with lovingkindness towards myself, towards the people in my life, towards life itself, the world as it is now, and the divine.

During this day, I can work this muscle by looking at all the strangers I encounter and seeing how I can feel unconditional regard, caring, and concern for them.

Week 1 Day 2: Gevurah she'b'Chesed

Today is 2 days of the Omer

limits within lovingkindness

Tonight, I will wonder about the relationship between lovingkindness and the setting of limits and boundaries.

Sometimes we set limits as an expression of unconditional love (say, a child's bedtime, a teenager's curfew) and even if the person breaks the limit and there are consequences, there is no break in our love towards them. Sometimes we have to make it clear that if a person continues to go beyond our boundaries (for instance, by being violent or unfaithful), then we cannot be in loving relationship with them (though we may still have loving feelings towards them). And sometimes the limits and

restrictions we set are not really expressions of lovingkindness, even though we tell ourselves they are.

During this day, I can try to discern the different kinds of limits I set, including the limits I set with myself. I can think about particular relationships and issues in my life and work to set loving limits and to set limits lovingly, whenever possible.

Week 1 Day 3: Tiferet she'b'Chesed
Today is 3 days of the Omer
balance within lovingkindness

Tonight, I will think about the previous two days of the Omer; I will work on my ability to flow, as appropriate and needed, between moments of lovingkindness with no boundaries (Chesed she b'Chesed) and lovingkindness with discernment (Gevurah she b'Chesed).

Sometimes we get stuck and believe that these are mutually exclusive aspects of love; that loving unconditionally means not having boundaries and that having boundaries set towards us means the love is not real love.

Today, I try to look where I am stuck and work to get beyond this dichotomy.

During this day, I can work the Tiferet she b'Chesed muscle by consciously getting centered for a minute here and a minute there throughout the day. I will work to respond to all of today's situations from that centered, balanced, and synthesizing place.

Week 1 Day 4: Netzach she'b'Chesed
Today is 4 days of the Omer
persistence within lovingkindness

Tonight, I will look at the obstacles to giving and receiving lovingkindness-the obstacles within me, in my relationships, within my country and in the world. I will wonder how I can move through and actively transform these obstacles.

I will explore where persistence furthers.

During this day, I will try to identify one obstacle that seems most pressing, most key; that calls me and seems “to have my name on it”; that I can work on and effect change.

**Week 1 Day 5: Hod she’b’Chesed
Today is 5 days of the Omer
acceptance within lovingkindness**

Tonight, I intend to work on identifying and open-heartedly acknowledging and accepting those obstacles to lovingkindness that seem beyond my ability to affect or control (at least for now).

Accepting a problem, within us or in how we are in the world, does not mean giving into the problem or giving up or thinking that things are “okay” as they are. Accepting a problem or situation means acknowledging that it exists and is indeed a problem; that the situation is as it is in this moment. It becomes easier to resolve a problem after it becomes acceptable to us that we have it.

During this day, I work on identifying some particularly difficult and painful problem and acknowledging where I have made progress and where I have failed and where the situation may be beyond my direct, conscious control.

**Week 1 Day 6: Yesod she’b’Chesed
Today is 6 days of the Omer.**

foundation within lovingkindness

The foundation of a building reaches down into the ground and up into the sky; it is where growth starts in both directions. We usually think that it is pretty impossible to affect the foundation once it is set.

Tonight, I will explore my foundational beliefs and feelings about unconditional love. I will consider something impossible about how I love and about the love there is to receive.

On the seventh day of Passover, which is the day of Yesod she b'Chesed, we were at the Sea of Reeds, the impassable water before us and Pharaoh's army behind us. We persisted and did everything we could (we walked into the sea as far as we could without drowning). We stood at that point and acknowledged that there was no more we could do on our own; we were available with all our hearts for help, whether it came in unexpected or ordinary ways. The sea parted and we started walking again.

During this day, I will hold together the image of the Sea of Reeds and my work on lovingkindness. If I am on the beginning shore, I wonder what steps I need to take. If the water is up to my nose, I open myself up to help. If I am walking through a clear passage, I feel my thankfulness. These options are not at all mutually exclusive.

Week 1 Day 7: Malchut she'b'Chesed

Today is 7 days of the Omer, which is 1 week of the Omer

dominion within lovingkindness

Tonight, I intend to look back at all the aspects of Chesed, of unconditional lovingkindness, that I have explored this week. These aspects dwell within me and flow through me; I want to

inhabit these aspects, and Chesed as a whole, more fully and deeply than ever before.

During this day, I can play with the image of the Prophetess Miriam crossing the sea, dancing as a way to lovingly celebrate our passage from narrowness to freedom, open-heartedly entering our new and unknown territory. I will wonder how I can be sensitive to and inhabit Chesed in my on-going life; how I will stay in touch with the true sources of Chesed within and beyond me.

The week of Chesed ends today, but we do not leave it behind as we move on. The traces of our explorations come with us. Chesed is always part of our dominion, our territory.



The Second Week: Gevurah

by Sandra Razieli

The sephira of *Gevurah* encompasses the attributes of strength, structure, discipline and discernment. Sometimes the attribute of *Gevurah* is called *Din*, which means judgment. On the two dimensional, hierarchical Kabbalistic tree of life, *Gevurah* is horizontally across from *Chesed*, acknowledging a clear dialectical relationship between the two.

The week of *Gevurah* gives us the opportunity to reveal, embrace, and more deeply understand our inner and outer strengths. Together we will explore how *Gevurah* can fortify our sense of purpose as we recognize ourselves as the protagonists in our own lives' stories. Through mindful reflection and physical practices you are invited to uncover some of the multitudinous ways that embracing the qualities of *Gevurah* can guide and enhance our lives.

As we count the Omer, we will see that *Gevurah* is essential for the health and well-being of our personal lives, our communities and the world. I will include a body practice suggestion for each day of the coming week. As the body is the structure that houses our soul, including our body in our explorations of *Gevurah* offers us additional pathways through which to experience the multifaceted aspects of this powerful sephira.

The word "*Gevurah*" is composed of the root letters gimmel, bet and heh. These are the same three letters as the word '*gever*' which means 'man.' (Note: the word *geveret*, which means woman, is a feminized version of the same root) Nouns with this root include: man; hero; strength, and the protagonist in a novel. The name "Gabriel," meaning my strength is God, is also derived from this root.

Adjectives with this same root include: mighty, valiant, and courageous. As a verb these root letters can mean: to be mighty, increase, prevail, strengthen, overcome, overpower, conquer, defeat, subdue, and beat.

Some scholars claim that Hebrew originally had two letter roots. If so, then it is possible that the origin of the word *Gevurah* comes from the letters *gimmel* and *bet*, which spell *gav* or 'back' as in "I've got your back."

Go Gevurah!

Week 2 Day 1: Chesed she'b'Gevurah

Today is 8 days of the Omer, which is 1 week and 1 day of the Omer

How can Chesed be an aspect of Gevurah? Aren't they complete opposites? Hard versus soft, angular versus round. Gevurah is a channel, giving us borders, definitions, and direction. But the essence and power of this channel goes far beyond its structure. Gevurah has a purpose that is informed and guided by Chesed. Chesed gives life to Gevurah. The loving flow of Chesed carries a wisdom that softens overly hard edges and simultaneously supports the power of Gevurah to choose the right path.

What places of rigidity in my life would benefit from a greater flow of love and compassion?

Where can I soften and still maintain a healthy integrity?

Body Practice - A Mountain

- Stand or Sit

- Lift Your Toes and feel the bones of your feet rooting towards the surface beneath your skin.
- Alternatively, place the palm of your hand on a hard surface and lift your fingers up. Use the sensation of grounding down, as a guide to encourage your spine to lift up.
- Stand or sit tall like a mountain and feel the structure of your body. Feel the bones and muscles that hold all your parts together.

Know that these more solid tissues provide a necessary structure for your existence. The vessel of your body is a house for your soul.

Soften or close your eyes. Listen and feel what is contained by the structure; breath, blood, and spirit.

Feel the flow, embrace the flow. Be one with the flow. Know that all that flows inside is channeled and supported by your outer structure.

Week 2 Day 2: Gevurah she'b'Gevurah **Today is 9 days of the Omer, which is 1 week and 2 days of the Omer**

Gevurah within Gevurah is strong and determined. There are times in our lives when it is a gift to be able to call on the strength of Gevurah to carry us through. Sometimes we just need to hold on but if we are always living in Gevurah we will become hard in body and soul. If we can wisely tap into Gevurah when needed, it will help us out of sticky and challenging situations. Gevurah gives us an anchor that can safely ground us in the present while providing the opportunity to be aware of and open to possibilities of our future.

When is invoking the quality of Gevurah necessary for my safety or the safety of others?

When does acting with too much Gevurah cause harm?

Body Practice- A Warrior Pose

- Take your legs about a leg length apart and stand with your feet parallel.
- Turn your left foot and leg towards your right leg at an approximately 45-degree angle.
- Turn your right leg 90 degrees towards to the right.
- Take your arms up to shoulder height.
- Bend your right knee so that the knee moves towards being perpendicular with your ankle.
- Once you have come into this warrior position, root your back foot down towards the floor, encourage your spine to lengthen, and then look out over your right arm.

Consider the possibility that your back leg is an anchor, drawing on strength and fortitude from past experiences. This anchor gives support and guidance to help center your spine in the present moment. And from your roots in the past, your presence in the present, you can look with discernment out towards the future.

Repeat on the left side.

Week 2 Day 3: Tiferet she'b'Gevurah

Today is 10 days of the Omer, which is 1 week and 3 days of the Omer

Tiferet informs Gevurah that there is wisdom in strength and discipline. Tiferet lets Gevurah know that it is necessary to be strong and create boundaries even when we may feel that such action creates an uncomfortable distance and separation.

Tiferet informs us that manifesting and accepting Gevurah can bring comfort and ease; sometimes saying, “no!” leads to greater harmony. Tiferet lets us be strong with a sense of beauty and grace. Tiferet gives Gevurah permission to thrive.

When might cultivating greater discipline create more ease for myself or others?

How can I bring a sense of grace to holding difficult yet necessary boundaries?

Body Practice - Dance and Rest

Dance

Put on your favorite music and dance. May you enjoy a harmonious flow as you move your muscles and bones to the rhythm of the music.

Constructive Rest

Lie on your back with your knees bent.

Place your feet hips distance apart and then take your heels just a little wider than your toes (be slightly pigeon toed).

Then, let your knees fall in towards each other, touching if possible. The intention is to find a place where you do not need effort to hold up your legs.

Lovingly rest your hands underneath your naval.

Now, close your eyes and begin by watching your exhalation.

The structure of your body is present. It contains all that is necessary for you to experience the wonders of this material world. Let it be just as it is. Let your breath flow. Allow your body to be nourished by your breath. Stay here for 5-15 minutes.

Week 2 Day 4: Netzach she'b'Gevurah

Today is 11 days of the Omer, which is 1 weeks and 4 days of the Omer

While Gevurah is raw strength, Netzach is the strength of endurance. Netzach within Gevurah is full of power; the power to be steady, the power to achieve. To endure within strength does not mean to hold stiff, or to hold one exact position - but, rather, to persist within one's direction. We need to be well-prepared and well-rested for our strength to endure. Without Netzach, our Gevurah will burn out and collapse.

What is one small thing you can do to nourish yourself so that you have more endurance?

Consider how this might augment your ability to face difficulties as well as enhance your capacity to receive and experience joy.

Body Practice - Connecting from Earth to Sky

- Stand with your feet about hips distance apart.
- Interlace your fingers.
- Stretch your arms out in front of you and lift them overhead.
- Lift your toes and feel the ground below you.
- Bring your toes back to the ground but still feel your feet rooting downwards.
- Release your hands and turn your palms to face each other.

- From the grounding of your feet, reach your fingers towards the sky.

In Hebrew the word for sky, *shamay'yim* literally means, “over there is water.” As your feet are nourished by earth, let your fingers be nourished by the water of the sky.

We live in the eternal connection of earth to sky and sky to the earth. The support of the ground below helps us reach towards the heavens above, continuously connecting us and replenishing our strength.

Week 2 Day 5: Hod she'b'Gevurah **Today is 12 days of the Omer, which is 1 week and 5 days of the Omer**

Gevurah must have a sense of humility and gratitude. Without humility, a warrior (*gibor*) is just a machine. A true warrior must be willing to look inside, to know that one's intentions come not from just the desire to be strong but for a higher purpose. Hod gives Gevurah the essential knowledge of why it acts in the world. Hod gives us the ability to look inwards and outwards. It gives us the ability to focus on one point and also see everything around us. Hod guides Gevurah's purpose and prevents us from getting caught up in striving to just be strong.

What parts of me are strong because there were others to help me develop these strengths?

To whom might I direct gratitude for helping to guide and develop my strengths?

Body Practice- Honing Our Gaze

- Sit or stand in a comfortable position.
- Bring your gaze to one object in front of you.

- Look at it carefully, with one-pointed vision.
- Then, let the back of your eyes soften and widen your gaze.
- Let your eyes and brain receive your vision of the periphery.
- Give yourself some time to make this transition.

With a soft gaze, take in the truth of all that surrounds you.

Gather your intention and strength like you would draw back the string on a bow, take time to choose the exact target of your energies - to acknowledge and enunciate your purpose for today. Then, note how this purpose is also part of your wider vision.

Week 2 Day 6: Yesod she'b'Gevurah

Today is 13 days of the Omer, which is 1 week and 6 days of the Omer

Yesod is a wellspring for Gevurah. It provides the foundation and confidence from which Gevurah can grow. Gevurah may like to think it can stand alone. We may think that strength can be strength by virtue of its existence. Yesod shows this to be a false notion. Yesod may be quiet and hidden but it is absolute necessary for existence. It gives the structure for the structure, provides the roots of strength. It's the protein that's necessary for our muscles to grow and endure. The calcium that nourishes our bones.

From where can I source confidence to be strong and present in the world?

What kind of grounding would help me to let my confident strength shine more into the world?

Body Practice -Play with Your Feet

Go Barefoot - that might be enough.

Or

- Sit in a chair while barefoot.
- Wiggle your toes.

Then

- Place your left ankle over your right thigh.
- Interlace the fingers of your right hand in between the toes of your left foot.
- Use your hands to help circle your ankle

Then

- One by one, use the fingers of your right hand to explore the range of movement of each toe. Move the toes around, wiggle them.

Then

- With the thumbs of both hands, explore the spaces between the bones on the top of your left foot. Knead into those spaces.

Then

- Take your thumbs to the bottom of your left foot. Knead into those places.

Repeat with the right foot.

Take a walk while barefoot. Notice and feel your feet touching and connecting with the surface below. Consider how attention

to your foundation might increase your awareness of the strength and power inherent in your whole body.

Week 2 Day 7: Malchut she'b'Gevurah

Today is 14 days of the Omer, which is 2 weeks of the Omer

Malchut within Gevurah says, “YES!!” I am here. I am strong. And it is good!” Let us thrive with the beauty of strength, power and determination!

I will reflect upon a moment when I felt totally present, secure and strong.

Body Practice - Big Pose

- Stand with your legs as wide apart as feels comfortable.
- Lift your arms up and out to the side, slightly higher than shoulder distance apart. Spread your fingers.
- Lift your toes, engage the muscles of your legs and draw them upwards.
- Then, bring your toes back to the ground but keep your legs engaged.
- Squeeze the muscles of your arms and reach your arms wide.
- Lift your gaze slightly upwards
- Be Big.
- Take up lots of space.
- From the depths of your belly loudly proclaim “S’hma!”

Embrace the majestic in your bigness!



The Third Week: Tiferet

By Rabbi David J. Cooper

TIFERET is the third of the the seven lower sephirot. Tiferet can be translated as “beauty” or “harmony.” The way that it appears in the traditional graphic arrangement of the sephirot indicates its role. It is almost at the very center of all the sefirot, not on the right or left, neither among the upper sephirot, nor among those lower down.

Thus, in the sephirotic arrangement, its meaning as harmonizer or mediator is preeminent. Especially important it is that Tiferet immediately follows the dynamic opposites of Gevurah (power/authority/law) and Chesed (love/largesse/kindness). Tiferet affirms that balance needs to be strived for between

those sephirot which are not mediators but which are in dynamic tension.

That said, Tiferet can be also be interpreted – especially during the omer – to reflect issues of the aesthetic, the beautiful, the artistic.

Week 3 Day 1: Chesed she'b'Tiferet
Today is 15 days of the Omer, which is 2 weeks, 1 day of the Omer

We are in the week of TIFERET, which literally means “beauty” or “glory.” As mentioned in the introduction, TIFERET to me has the connotation of “balance.” I also like “harmony” as a way to understand TIFERET because like “beauty” it connotes an aesthetic aspect. Later in the week I’ll use different meanings of TIFERET, but today, “beauty.”

Today, on the CHESED day of TIFERET week, the day of LOVINGKINDNESS within BEAUTY, I think of an experience I had leading a recent intimate Shabbat morning service in the Fireside Room at Kehilla. As I looked up at the people assembled I was struck by how beautiful they were. Now by conventional standards as evidenced by what is considered “beautiful” in our magazines and television commercials, we were all rather ordinary looking folk. But I could not help but see everyone there as gorgeous: each person a different age, shaped differently, different genders. Why were they so beautiful to me in that moment? And I thought each of them is manifesting their own unique CHESED in that moment, fully present, open to a spiritual Shabbat moment, each looking like they were there in full lovingkindness

How was it that I saw each of them as beautiful? I think it was that their faces glowed with CHESED, but I probably would have

missed that glow but for the fact that I was looking at them in my own moment CHESED, with my feelings of love.

Perhaps then, if I look at people through CHESED-colored lenses, they all look beautiful, especially if they too are in a moment of when their CHESED is showing.

Week 3 Day 2: Gevurah she'b'Tiferet **Today is 16 days of the Omer, which is 2 weeks and 2 days of the Omer**

GEVURAH can be “power” (or “stern judgment” or “authority”). And TIFERET can be “balance.” So my first thought was “balance of power!” But that would be more appropriate for the week of TIFERET sheh-b-GEVURAH. So for today, I’ll regard it as “the POWER of BALANCE.”

We are taught from the eastern martial arts that with balance we may have more power than in forceful movement. I think of the Shaolin Kung Fu masters who demonstrate how by maintaining balance when under attack, one can parry the assault and nullify it better than attempting to counter-attack it with force.

I’m no Shaolin monk and I can’t remember the last time I had to parry a violent attack. However, I regard this teaching as a metaphor for how we hold ourselves as we engage in the struggle for a better world. In the pursuit of justice and peace, I would seek to find our power in steadfast non-violence. Consider how Martin Luther King, Jr. demonstrated that the dogs and fire hoses of Selma were no match for the demonstrators who were trained by the Highlander Folk School in Gandhian thought and practice.

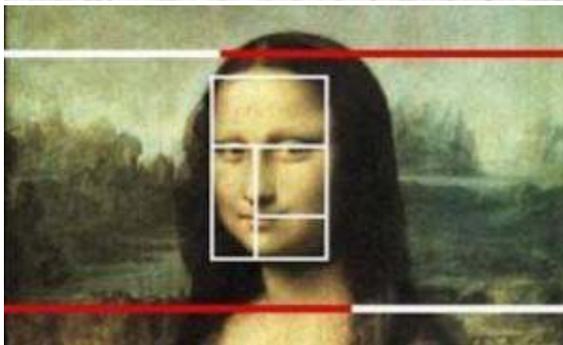
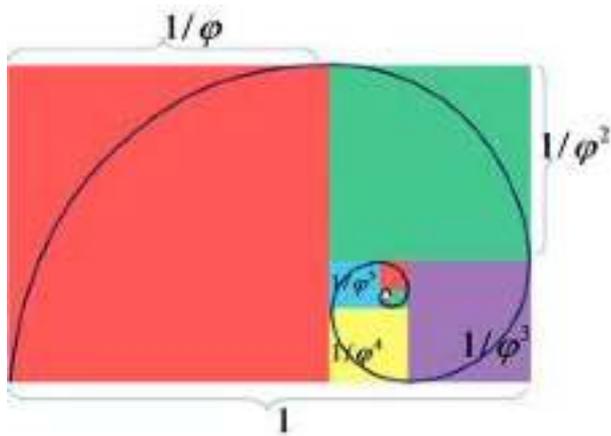
In my daily life, I do not always succeed in balancing well. And it is precisely when I am trying to force my way through that I am at my weakest.

Rabbi ben-Zoma asked and answered (in Ethics of the Elders 4:1): “Who is strong? One who has power over his inclinations.”

Week 3 Day 3: Tiferet she’b’Tiferet
Today is 17 days of the Omer, which is 2 weeks and 3 days of the Omer

If TIFERET can be seen as “balance,” or “harmony,” I often regard it as the sephirah with which we aesthetically experience the world in its elegance. So TIFERET of TIFERET could be thought of as the BEAUTY of BALANCE, and BALANCE within BEAUTY. I think of how the architects and artists of the medieval period used the ideas of Pythagoras and Euclid concerning beauty and geometry. Greek, Roman, medieval architects and artists applied these ideas in their paintings, sculptures and places of worship.

For example, the Greeks came up with the idea of the unique rectangle defined by the “Golden Ratio” where the proportion of height to width was such that if you formed within it a square using the length of the shorter side and removed it, you would have another, but smaller rectangle of exactly the same proportion. This removal of the square could be done with the remaining rectangle with the same result. (It is fractal structure.) And this could be done ad infinitum.



Well, I don't often look for Golden Ratios, but I am frequently tantalized by the gorgeous balances in nature, in art, and in design. When I allow myself to see this, I open myself to the infinite beauty I can see at every scale beyond the specific thing I am looking at in that moment.

This aesthetic appreciation of balanced beauty is not limited to sight. The aesthetic balance of many different phenomena and media can be experienced in by different senses.

We see the beauty of balance.

We hear it in prose and poetry,

We experience it in song and in prayer as well.

Lets dance to the beauty of balance and to the balance of beauty.

Week 3 Day 4: Netzach she'b'Tiferet

Today is 18 days of the Omer, which is 2 weeks and 4 days of the Omer

We turn our attention this day to

NETZACH in TIFERET, to PERSISTENCE of BEAUTY.

But we say that beauty is fleeting, or that it fades with time. But when we say that, we mean physical beauty, and we are probably speaking about commercially reinforced ideas of conventional beauty. If we speak of fleeting beauty we are referring to beauty which is "superficial" or "surface." Both of these terms means "outer face." For persistent beauty we must look below the outer face and see what is hidden beneath or behind.

In Exodus 33, Moses demands to see God's face, and God refuses to be seen at the surface, but allows Moses to see him "behind." This is usually thought of as a sort of compromise, that Moses is getting something less than what he was asking

for. But in a sense, any face of God is superficial, it would be an idol's face. It would be God in a snapshot, it would have nothing of the eternal about it. To see the 'face' of God and believe that it is God, is a spiritual death. ("No one may see My face and live.") Instead, what is revealed to Moses is the reality that whatever is divine must be known as unknowable, as the Mystery. Moses was not short-changed; he got far more than he asked for.

As it says in the Tao Te Ching:

Passersby may stop for music and good food,
but a description of the Tao
seems without substance or flavor.
It cannot be seen, it cannot be heard,
and yet it cannot be exhausted.

Week 3 Day 5 Hod she'b'Tiferet

Today is 19 days of the Omer, which is 2 weeks and 5 days of the Omer

HOD, literally "splendor" or "glory" is the sephirah that invites the least amount of definitional agreement. Without dissing any other definition, I see HOD and NETZACH as a dynamic pair related to *time*.

For me, if NETZACH is time in its persistence, then HOD is time in an emblematic moment.

Thus for me, marriage is NETZACH, a wedding is HOD.

Education is NETZACH, a graduation is HOD.

Diaspora is NETZACH, the destruction of the Temple is HOD

Thus for me, HOD of TIFERET is the moment of the immediate apprehension of beauty. Perhaps Yosemite is there for the ages - it is there in NETZACH - but that moment I enter the valley and am struck by its beauty is a HOD moment of TIFERET.

All around me is eternal beauty, but I cannot consciously absorb it every single moment. So I have to sometimes set aside single moments of time to appreciate the eternal beauty. Sometimes these moments occur spontaneously - I see a glorious sight and I pause; I stop and observe and smell the flowers. Each artwork I see in the museum is the artist's moment of HOD captured in an artifact which points to an eternal beauty beyond the single moment depicted.

To me, the periodic prayer services and the liturgies of the Jewish experience provide me with time-limited HOD moments in which I can to appreciate the eternalness of beauty.

Week 3 Day 6: Yesod she'b'Tiferet

Today is 20 days of the Omer, which is 2 weeks and 6 days of the Omer

YESOD means "foundation" but to most of the Kabbalists who delved into the concept of the sephirot, YESOD (or Y'SOD) has come to be associated with the sexual, the erotic, the reproductive, the carnal. And I am actually delighted that one of the divine energy flows of the sephirot system is directly associated with sexuality. If any spiritual system left it out, it would be a serious act of denial .

Now if I had my choice, I would have preferred to consider TIFERET sheh-b-YESOD, or the **BEAUTY of SEXUALITY**. But what I have is YESOD sheh-b-TIFERET, the SEXUALITY of BEAUTY. I started to look for a way to get around this or reinterpret TIFERET and YESOD for today's posting, and then—pursuant to

this system of self-awareness that this Omer counting asks of us—I pondered why was I reluctant. What was bothering me?

I am not comfortable with how often beauty is sexualized in commercial imagery. If someone is not what the media images as sexual, then we are led to believe that they are not beautiful. It also means that when we see someone that strikes us as beautiful, we're encouraged to confuse our aesthetic and spiritual appreciation with sexual attraction. So this is an aspect of YESOD (sexual) within TIFERET (beauty) about which we need to caution ourselves.

But switching to a positive note...

YESOD, in its erotic meaning, has the connotation of “connectedness” and “attraction.” And when I speak of the YESOD of TIFERET, I'm talking about the power of Beauty (in its many meanings) that draws us in and draws us together.

So, what is it in your life that feels powerfully beautiful, and how does this attract and draw people together? For example I can think of the beauty I experience in music and the way that it draws us together in community at concerts, in synagogue, at dances. But there are many other sacred sources of beauty: nature, art, and even social action designed with artistry.

Week 3 Day 7: Malchut sheh b'Tiferet

Today is 21 days of the Omer, which is 3 weeks of the Omer

MALCHUT means “sovereignty.” It is associated with the concept of SHECHINAH and I am interpreting it here to be divinity as we experience it directly. Not transcendent divinity, but imminent. It is the experience of the sacred within the here and now - if we let it in. SHECHINA is also associated with

COMMUNITY and SHECHINA is said to be found wherever people come together in assembly.

When we gather together there is something there that is more than the sum of our parts. That something is SHECHINA, the “presence of presence,” (a.k.a. ‘the Indwelling Presence”).

For me this year, MALCHUT sheh-b-TIFERET is

PRESENCE within HARMONY.

TIFERET is the great balancer or harmonizer between things that are in dynamic relationship. There is the one singer’s melody; there is the other singer’s melody; and then there is the sound of the harmony when they sing them together. There is you; there is me; and then there is that presence which is more than the sum of you plus me. That presence is MALCHUT of TIFERET, the DIVINE PRESENCE located within the moment of HARMONY. It is Buber’s God, the eternal I-Thou manifested in the “in-betweenness” of every I-and-Thou experience.

In what ways do you find you experience A SACRED PRESENCE within your moments of RELATIONSHIP?



The Fourth Week: Netzach

by Rabbi Diane Elliot

We are beginning the week of *Netzach*: Endurance, Perseverance, Victory, Success

What is it that keeps you going on a long-term project, in a long-term relationship, with the day-to-day demands of life—especially when the going gets rough, when you’re ambushed by physical or emotional pain or mired in doubt? The *sefirah* of *netzach* teaches the quality of Divine perseverance, of endurance. Sometimes translated as “victory” or “success,” the quality of *netzach* draws me onward, even when I’ve lost my way, can’t see clearly ahead, or feel as if I’m bogged down in the quicksand of life.

Think of a marathon runner, who hits “the wall”—that state of depletion at which body and mind stop functioning—at about mile 20 and goes on to finish the 26-mile race. Think Michelangelo, suspended on a scaffold for four years, painting Biblical scenes in exquisite detail on the ceiling on the Sistine Chapel. Think Moses who, after reluctantly accepting his mission of leading the Israelite people from bondage to the Land of Promise, sees his God-given mission through to the very end. Think of any parent, lovingly and persistently nurturing a child from babyhood into adulthood.

Netzach has been described as “love with a container, a mission, one’s holy work, specific creativity, the ability to *sustain* one’s sense of mission.” The key is “love,” and the victory is not reaching a longed-for goal, but ongoing presence and the growth of the deep faith needed to sustain our worthy endeavors, to become as fully ourselves as we can be.

Week 4, Day 1: *Chesed sheh b’Netzach*

Today is 22 days of the Omer, which is 3 weeks and 1 day of the Omer

Lovingkindness within Endurance

Today we begin our week’s journey through the realm of *Netzach* with the exploration of how love, *Chesed*, fuels our success. For each day, I’ll offer a series of practices to get us started. Do all, choose one, or simply read and contemplate....

Begin with a little stretching, breathing, moving, and sounding to awaken the physical connection, the inner body pathway, between your right your right hip and leg (the body parts associated with *Netzach*) and your right shoulder and arm (the body parts associated with *Chesed*)

Then close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Be sure to release all the air on the exhalations, as you reflect on these questions:

- ~ What long-term projects am I currently engaged in?*
- ~ What immediate tasks are calling for my attention?*
- ~ Where do I find motivation?*

Now bring to mind a dear mentor, teacher, or guide—someone who has lovingly supported your growth, commiserated with your struggles, and *kvelled* over your successes. Perhaps you can recall a special grade school teacher or a high school teacher who especially encouraged you; a parent, aunt, uncle, or grandparent who delighted in your accomplishments; a friend who stood by you and believed in you when you doubted your own abilities; a mentor who supported you unconditionally; or an angelic, invisible guide who has accompanied you through your life's passages. See and feel that being's presence as vividly as you can. How does their love, delight, confidence in you affect you? What are you aware of in your body? Your mind?

When you open your eyes, you may want to do some writing, drawing, or dancing to integrate your experience of the love that underlies your ability to endure and succeed.

Today I choose one of my ongoing projects, large or small, and spend some time, even a few minutes, working on it. Whenever I feel the need, I stop, breathe, and bring to mind my mentor's loving presence.

Week 4, Day 2: *Gevurah sheh b'Netzach* Today is 23 days of the Omer, which is 3 weeks and 2 days of the Omer

Discipline within Endurance

I began writing this blog on the third day of *Pesach*. At each mealtime I found my arm reaching for the kitchen cabinet that holds our everyday dairy dishes, now sealed shut with apple green masking tape. I had to remind my arm over and over to redirect its efforts toward a *different* cabinet, the one that held the plain white Corelle dishes I purchased last year especially for Passover. Over and over my hand automatically reaches for the familiar place, then stops in mid-air and waits for my wandering mind to reconnect with my body and redirect my hand toward a different cabinet.

The boundaries I choose to keep around the Passover foods and dishes remind me how challenging it is to change a habit, to short circuit even a simple behavior engraved in the muscles and nerves of my arm. This is the beauty of *Gevurah* within *Netzach*—when I choose to take on a discipline over time, to shift even a small thing in my life, I build the spiritual muscle to maintain a deeper and more immediate level of presence. And when I can remember that the discipline itself is rooted in *Chesed*, love, then space is made for deep, good, and subtle shifts—in the world and in myself.

~ Begin with a little stretching and moving to awaken the physical connection, the inner body pathway, between your right hip and leg (the body parts associated with *Netzach*) and your left shoulder and arm (the body parts associated with *Gevurah*). Feel their diagonal connection pass right through the core of your body.

~ Draw your attention inward and take a few deep breaths. Be sure to release all the air on the exhalations, as you reflect on these questions:

~ *What activities help strengthen my ability to bring projects to fruition?* ~ *How does discipline support my endurance?*

~ Contemplate this provocative line from a meditation in Gunilla Norris' book, *Simple Ways*:

**Could we slowly learn to live
the “no” that is really a deeper “yes”?**

~ Do some writing, drawing, or dancing exploring the “no” that leads to a deeper “yes”.

~ Today I notice how saying “no” to some things allows me to follow through on other things. I choose one of my ongoing projects, large or small, and complete it. Perhaps I sew a button on a jacket that’s been sitting for months in my sewing basket. Perhaps I recycle a pile of papers that’s been sitting in the corner of my office for two years. In bringing this project to completion, I experience the particular quality of satisfaction that accompanies Gevurah within Netzach.

Week 4, Day 3: Tiferet sheh b’Netzach

Today is 24 days of the Omer, which is 3 weeks and 3 days of the Omer

Beauty and Harmony within Endurance

Tiferet, the glowing, compassionate heart center, integrates and transforms the energies of *Chesed* and *Gevurah*, the right and left shoulders, arms, and hands. *Tiferet*'s quintessential gesture, the prayer hands of *Namaste*, reminds us of how the radiant beauty of our own hearts can communicate directly with the radiant hearts of other beings—animals, plants, mountains, trees, lakes, rocks.

This story told by the poet and spiritual teacher Mark Nepo gives a poignant taste of *Tiferet* within *Netzach*, beauty within endurance:

“For three glorious years, I lived on Willett Street in Albany, New York, in an old brownstone on the edge of a beautiful park, which I could see year-round from my bay window. Across the street was a very old cherry tree whose surprising blossoms burst for only a few days in early May.

“The first year I called my dear friend Robert and my wife Susan, and we stood arm in arm beneath the tree, staring up into a swaying thicket of pink. Since it bloomed before everything else, the miracle of flowers sprouting from wood was shouting quietly. From that day, I watched the cherry tree intensely, in awe of how quickly and easily it would let go of all its apparent beauty, as quickly gone as it had come.

“There were times in late fall or winter when I felt as sudden in possibility, and as quickly bereft. I would go out in the rain or snow and place my hands against the trunk, as if asking for its counsel. And it always seemed to say in silence—*neither the fullness nor the bareness lasts, but we return.*

“By the second spring, we anticipated the days of blossom. At first sign, we gathered and read poems to the tree and to each other. After the second blossoming, I saw the tree’s bareness as a remarkable, enduring strength. Knowing this softness would return, and sprout from its woodiness, became a guide.”

(Seven Thousand Ways to Listen, p. 32)

- Massage and breathe into and out of the touch point of your heart at the center of your sternum. Do a little stretching and moving to awaken the physical connection, the inner body pathway, between your right hip and leg (the body parts

associated with *Netzach*) and your heart center (the area of the body associated with *Tiferet*).

~ Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Be sure to release all the air on the exhalations. Bring your hands into the *Namaste* prayer position an inch or two in front of your sternum, as you reflect on these questions:

~ How does inner harmony illuminate and magnify my success?

~ How does beauty nourish me and give me the strength to go on?

~ Return your attention to the here-and-now, and spend a few moments writing, drawing, or dancing your responses to the questions above.

~ Today I open my senses to beauty. I notice what particular forms, colors, movements, textures, tastes, and smells nourish and delight me. I feel myself buoyed up by my enjoyment of the beautiful in the accomplishing of today's to-do list.

Week 4, Day 4: Netzach sheh b'Netzach

Today is 25 days of the Omer, which is 3 weeks and 4 days of the Omer

Perseverance within Success

Netzach within *Netzach* carries us into the most concentrated experience of this *midah* (quality) in the entire 49-day *Omer* cycle. If your *Netzach*—your will to persevere, to stay focused, and to carry on—is in need of *tikkun* (repair), this is the day to meditate on that possibility, to pray for it, and to nurture the special strength of will that supports your ability to succeed.

Here's a poem by Gunilla Norris for inspiration:

Doing the Dishes

My life will always have dirty dishes.
If this sink can become
a place of contemplation,
let me learn constancy here.

I gaze through the window above the sink.
There I see the constancy of dawn,
the constancy of dusk,
the constancy of the seasons,
of the sun and moon,
and the rotation of the planets.

Your love is discerned by repetition.
Turn and return me to Your love.
Let my fitful human constancy
be strengthened in the willing,
wheeling wonder of Your stars.

(from *Being Home, Discovering the Spiritual in the Everyday*, p. 65)

~ Take a few moments to awaken your whole body with some breathing, stretching, and moving. Now focus your awareness on your right leg, not simply from the thigh down, but all the way up into your torso where your leg roots into your body—the right half of your pelvis, even your right kidney area! Wake up your leg by circling, shaking, and wiggling it. Press your weight into different parts of your leg, right down through your lower leg, ankle, foot, and toes. Did you know that each of your feet has 26 bones? See if you can feel the many joints in your right foot, the many possibilities for movement and support. Put on a favorite piece of dance music and let your right leg lead the dance.

~ Now stand or sit comfortably, close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Feel your whole body. Feel your right hip, leg, and foot as you contemplate these questions:

~ How has my will to keep going, my capacity to endure, led me to success?

~ How do I nurture my ability to persevere?

~ Return your attention to the here-and-now, and spend a few moments writing, drawing, or dancing your responses to the questions above.

~ Today I am aware of the miracle of life's ongoingness. I give thanks for what is constant, present, and enduring, even amidst all life's changes and losses. I thank my own body, mind, and spirit for all they have endured and all they have accomplished. Today I do one thing to deeply nourish my body and soul.

Week 4, Day 5: Hod she'b'Netzach

Today is 26 days of the Omer, which is 3 weeks and 5 days of the Omer

Splendor and Humility within Endurance

Hod surprises us with the awesome splendor of the Earth's infinite variety, bringing us to our knees again and again with the sheer volume of life's many miracles. This humbling in the face of the world's many gifts is one source of our Jewish practice of *brakhah* (blessing), a Hebrew word that shares the same root as *berekh* (knee). *Hod* within *Netzach* reminds me to constantly bless the tiniest and most majestic miracles of creation, to stay inspired in my endurance and humble in my success.

- Do a little stretching and moving to awaken the physical connection, the inner body pathway, between your right hip and leg (the body parts associated with *Netzach*) and your left hip and leg (the body parts associated with *Hod*). Feel the horizontal connection between your two hips, as well as the long arc of connection from your left foot, up through the core of your left leg to the left half of your pelvis, through the organs of your belly to your right hip and down through the core of your right leg to your right foot. Dance a little jig.

- Stand or sit comfortably, close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Feel your whole lower body, and especially your feet connecting with the Earth through the floor, as you contemplate these questions:

- What opens me to the splendor of life?

- How does attention to details help me to realize my long-term goals?

- Return your attention to the here-and-now, and spend a few moments writing, drawing, or dancing your responses to the questions above.

- Today I attend especially closely to the details of what I'm engaged with. I notice and delight in the design, precision, and profusion of things both natural and human-made. I choose one big or small project to work on and break it down into small action steps. I do one or two of the steps today and afterwards say a blessing of thanks.

Here's a poem by Mary Oliver to savor as you go about your day:

Mindful

Every day

I see or hear
something
that more or less

kills me
with delight,
that leaves me
like a needle

in the haystack
of light.
It is what I was born for—
to look, to listen,

to lose myself
inside this soft world—
to instruct myself
over and over

in joy,
and acclamation.
Nor am I talking
about the exceptional,

the fearful, the dreadful,
the very extravagant—
but of the ordinary,
the common, the very drab,

the daily presentations.
Oh, good scholar,
I say to myself,
how can you help

but grow wise
with such teachings
as these—

the untrimmable light

of the world,
the ocean's shine,
the prayers that are made
out of grass?

(*New and Selected Poems, Volume II*, pp. 90-91)

Week 4, Day 6: Yesod she'b'Netzach
Today is 27 days of the Omer, which is 3 weeks and 6
days of the Omer

Foundation within Endurance

Yesod, the powerful, generative belly center, is identified with the *hara* in Japanese martial arts and the lower *dantien* in Chinese medicine, and also with the penis energy (present in all genders). *Yesod* seeds our success in the material world and reminds us that our ability to persevere, to move forward in life, is fed and supported by a network of healthy relationships that sustain and balance us. *Yesod* within *Netzach* empowers us to keep going and reminds us to tend the web of relationships upon which our lives—and all life—depend.

~ Do a little breathing and moving to awaken the energy center deep inside your pelvis, at a level about halfway between pubic bone and navel (the area associated with *Yesod*). Now stretch, move, and sound to wake up the inner body pathway between your right hip and leg (the body parts associated with *Netzach*) and the *Yesod* center. Imagine that your right leg grows out of this center, and that your right foot connects through your leg back into it.

~ Stand or sit comfortably with feet on the floor, draw your attention inward, and take a few deep breaths. Remember to exhale completely, as you ask yourself these questions:

~ How does creativity help me to endure?

~ What relationships have been especially crucial in supporting my success?

~ Bring to mind one important, ongoing relationship in your life. Focus your awareness on that being's welfare, sending love, kindness, and gratitude, using the phrases below or words of your own choosing:

May you be happy, safe, and well.

May your heart be filled with love.

May your body be strong and healthy.

May you live your life with ease.

May you be blessed with peace.

~ When you open your eyes spend a few moments writing, drawing, or dancing your sense of how this relationship provides a foundation for your creative spark and your ability to persevere.

~ Today I feel the power in my own belly. I rejoice in my creative, generative potential, and notice those in my life who stimulate and support me to cultivate this power and share it in the world. I take a few moments to speak with or write to one of these folks, whether alive in body or not, and I articulate what their presence in my life has meant to me.

Week 4, Day 7: Malchut she'b'Netzach

Today is 28 days of the Omer, which is 4 weeks of the Omer.

Presence and Sovereignty within Endurance

We have reached the last day of this year's week of *Netzach*, and we're ready to give birth to our refurbished capacities for endurance, for perseverance, for successfully "bringing home" what we have begun! *Malchut*, sometimes called *Shechinah* (Holy Presence), invites us to manifest what we have learned and to stand fully within ourselves, *sovereign*, in this perfectly imperfect world of ours. How will your ability to keep on keeping on be different this year? What revelations will your expanded awareness of *Netzach* bring forth? What new ideas, creations, and relationships will you gestate?

~ Greet this day with some whole-body breathing, sighing, and stretching. Feel your right hip and leg (the body parts associated with *Netzach*) connecting to the base of your pelvis (the area associated with *Malkhut*, for all genders) and to the Earth between your feet. Do a stamping, birthing dance, and feel the power of new life coming through you.

~ Stand or sit comfortably with feet on the floor, draw your attention inward, and take a few deep breaths. Remember to exhale completely, as you ask yourself these questions:

~ How do I manifest my endurance in the world?

~ How do I define "success"?

~ Spend a few moments writing, drawing, or dancing your responses.

~ Here is a beautiful poem by Mary Oliver that speaks of the ongoingness of Creation:

Morning Poem

Every morning
the world
is created.
Under the orange

sticks of the sun
the heaped
ashes of the night
turn into leaves again

and fasten themselves to the high branches—
and the ponds appear
like black cloth
on which are painted islands

of summer lilies.
If it is your nature
to be happy
you will swim away along the soft trails

for hours, your imagination
alighting everywhere.
And if your spirit
carries within it

the thorn
that is heavier than lead—
if it's all you can do
to keep on trudging—

there is still
somewhere deep within you

a beast shouting that the earth
is exactly what it wanted—

each pond with its blazing lilies
is a prayer heard and answered
lavishly,
every morning,

whether or not
you have every dared to be happy,
whether or not
you have ever dared to pray.

(*New and Selected Poems*, pp. 106-107)

*~ Today I notice how every thing in the physical world,
including myself, emanates an inherent spirit that glows
from within it, her, him, or them. I sense how everything
touches everything else. I attune my own yearning to what
Abraham Joshua Heschel described as “the lonely holiness in
this world.”*

(quoted in Mark Nepo, *Seven Thousand Ways to Listen*, p. 19)

The Fifth Week: Hod

by Rabbi Dev Noily

Hod: Practicing Submission, yes, Submission in the Fifth Week

Hod holds many attributes, often described as splendor, majesty, glory, grandeur, vigor, and more. Last year, my friend Rabbi Ezra Weinberg wrote about the aspect of hod that has to do with “submission.” He opened up a whole new world of “hod” for me that I want to explore as we count the omer this year. Submission as a value can be off-putting and seem counter-intuitive. I want to see myself as strong, and as fighting the good fights, not as submitting. It’s easy to associate “submission” with weakness. But this “submission” of hod turns out to be a different kind of strength, possibly a deeper strength. If netzach brings the endurance to prevail over the things we need to overcome, hod brings the grace to let go of contending and to lean into what is. By aligning ourselves with, and by submitting to, what is, we can free up energy and power for the true path.

Our Muslim siblings have much to teach us about submitting to What Is. The words “Muslim” and “Islam” are often said to refer to submission to G-d. The words share the Arabic root that in Hebrew gives us the family of words related to “shalom.” The relationship between “submission” and “peace/wholeness” is compelling. What is it like to submit to What Is—to the What Is of the universe, to the What Is of G-d?. It’s a giving over of ourselves and our will to the larger whole of Life. It’s a recognition that we belong to something greater than our own selves. To submit to that—to let go and allow ourselves to fall into the Is-ness that manifests as starlight and eucalyptus leaf and melody—is to touch a peace and a homecoming and a wholeness that cannot be found in any victory.

During the week of *hod*, we'll explore different aspects of submission as *hod* meets up with each of the other *sefirot*. We'll experiment with practices to help us touch this mysterious path to liberation and peace.

Maybe this has happened to you, too: it's nighttime and I'm far from home, far from the city. I go out into the dark night and the sky is clear. Looking up, I feel myself standing in the center of a vast dome filled with stars. I remember that what looks like a dome is really infinite space. I remember that what look like stars are also other galaxies, each filled with millions of stars, thousands of light years away, their light reaching me from a past more ancient than I can imagine. I remember that our sun is just a tiny ember, our earth just a particle of dust. So what does that make me? And just as I'm about to dissolve into complete nothingness and disappear, something stirs in me. Almost imperceptibly I'm swept up into the expanse, aware of my oneness with it, made holy by its holiness, made grand by its grandeur. Humbled and ennobled at once, contracting into a nano-speck only to find myself expanding into the all. It's a moment, and it passes.

I wonder if this is a way to touch the idea of *Hod*, of the splendor of the Infinite hidden in the center of submission, the heart-opening that accompanies humility in the face of loving, generous authority. As *Netzah* lets us explore the force of will, desire, endurance, persistence, *Hod* invites us into letting go, giving over, being a vessel for a will other than our own.



Week 5 Day 1 Chesed she'b'Hod

Today is 29 days of the Omer, which is 4 weeks and 1 day of the Omer

Lovingkindness within Submission

This week, we devote ourselves to holy submission. Held and guided by the week's path through the seven lower *sefirot*, we can experiment with what may feel like a strange and unwelcome—even a dangerous—move: giving over our power and authority, submitting to the will of another.

To whose will should we submit?

Here, we have some options. It may be to G-d's will. Or to the will of a trusted teacher, healer, guide, lover or other source of human authority. It may be that today, we submit to the will of who we were yesterday.

Choose a Daily Practice for the Week of Hod

Pick something that you'd like to work with this week to explore submission. You might explore submitting to G-d through the practice of a daily mitzvah. Or submitting to yourself through a daily practice or discipline you've been drawn to: exercise, writing, being in nature, meditating, praying, listening deeply to someone you love, committing to a healthy bedtime or wake-up time. Or submitting to the guidance of a teacher or healer or friend through the daily practice of something they've recommended for you.

Each day as we engage in this activity or practice through submission, we'll bring the energy and quality of the day's *sephirah* to our exploration.

Each day's *kavannah* will include a brief prayer, using the name, *Ribbono Shel Olam* (Master of the Universe), to address the Mystery. This name reminds us that we are not the Master, and so itself is part of our practice. Notice your response to saying the words, *Ribbono Shel Olam*.

In letting go and giving over, may we begin to touch the majesty, the splendor of *Hod*!

We begin with compassion. It's not easy, this practice. Whatever arises, we welcome it without judgment. Today, we practice submission with gentle, loving compassion.

Kavannah/Intention:

Ribbono Shel Olam, Master of the Universe, today I step into the experience of submitting, letting go, giving over. Help me to bring compassion and love to my practice of letting go. May my practice today be of service to You and to Your Creation.

YHVH, our Master, We hear Your name in the majesty of the earth, we see You in the splendor (hod) of the stars!

**יהוה אדנינו מה־אדיר שִׁמְךָ בְּכֹל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־תָּנָה
הוֹדֶךָ עֲלֵה־שָׁמַיִם**

Psalm 8:2

Week 5 Day 2: Gevurah she'b'Hod

Today is 30 days of the Omer, which is 4 weeks and 2 days of the Omer.

Discipline within Submission.

It's so natural to exert our will, to meet uncertainty with the force of doing, to respond to our vulnerability with the energy of anger, to use the formidable tools of our minds and hearts and bodies to try to change what is and to bend reality to the shape of our desires. Today, we notice where our discomfort with submission arises. We watch our "doing impulse" trying to get into the game. We call on *gevurah*, discipline, in order to stay with what is, to settle more deeply into the place of submitting and giving over.

Kavannah/Intention:

Ribbono Shel Olam, Master of the Universe, today I invite *gevurah*, discipline, into my experience of *hod*, letting go. Help me to live into this experience of submission by

giving over to the discipline of continuing to walk a path that I don't yet understand. May my practice today be of service to You and to Your Creation.

Gevurah/strength is the tool bound to your thigh like a sword; Hod/splendor and Hadar/majesty are yours.

חגור חרבה על־ירך גבור הודך והדרך

-Psalm 45:4

Week 5 Day 3: Tiferet she'b'Hod

Today is 31 days of the Omer, which is 4 weeks and 3 days of the Omer.

Balance within Submission

I volunteered to work with Hod because this idea of “submission” has been so challenging for me, as far back as I can remember. I work hard to be aware of, and to make conscious choices in response to my strong impulse to resist and transgress in the face of being commanded in any way. Working my Hod energy this week, I'm calling on the sweet spot where Chesed and Gevurah meet—the quiet radiance that emanates from the balance point between unconditionally loving compassion and a solid, consistent container that can hold it.

Today we bring Tiferet—balance, harmony, beauty—into our experience of Hod. We strive to submit completely, to let go of every last presumption of mastery and control. That's the unbounded flowing of Chesed. And we invoke Gevurah, discipline and strength, to discern to which power we are giving ourselves over. Submission to the wrong authority—to an abusive or idolatrous authority—is a real danger here. This meeting and

balance, this giving over completely to an authentic truth, is today's quality of sublime beauty in submitting.

Kavannah/intention:

Ribbono Shel Olam, Master of the Universe, today I invite *tiferet*, balance, into my experience of *hod*, letting go. Help me to discern the holy paths of submission. Help me to relax into them. Help me to find balance as I marshal all of my resources to this practice even as I give over my power and release my will to Yours. May my practice today be of service to You and to Your creation.

הַדְּוֹחֵדֵר לִפְנֵי עַז וְתַפְאֶרֶת בַּמִּקְדָּשׁ׃

Give over, and honor your encounter with truth; strength and tiferet/balance are in this holiness.

-- *Psalm 96:6*

Week 5 Day 4: Netzach she'b'Hod

Today is 32 days of the Omer, which is 4 weeks and 4 days of the Omer

Endurance within Submission

Netzach and Hod represent the right and left legs. Today, the balance of *tiferet* has flowed into *netzach*, leaving us standing solidly on two strong, spiritual foundations. There is an infinite stream of energy for endurance and persistence, always being received and welcomed into the container of *hod*, the ennobled humility that comes with giving ourselves over in submission to what is. This practice of letting go isn't for quitters—we're in it for the long haul, and we need the sustenance and renewal of *netzach*. As we begin to unlock the mysteries of *hod*, as our hearts open to being one with the All, we ourselves become the momentary containers for eternity. This is where we stand in the Universe.

Kavannah/Intention:

Ribbono Shel Olam, Master of the Universe, today I invite *netzach*, endurance/eternity, into my experience of *hod*, letting go. Help me to remember that this letting-go takes practice, and often doesn't come easily. Help me to tap into the long-haul energy of *netzach*, as my letting-go deepens and becomes more familiar. Let me feel the solidity of the spiritual pillars of *netzach* and *hod*, holding me steady in this moment. May my practice today be of service to You and to Your creation.

Splendor and magnificence are Holy acts; justice stands forever.

הוֹדוּהָר פִּעְלוֹ וצְדַקְתּוֹ עִמְדַת לַעַד

-Psalm 111:3

Week 5 Day 5: Hod she'b'Hod

Today is 33 days of the Omer, which is 4 weeks and 5 days of the Omer

Submission within Submission

Today, the day of *hod* in *hod*, is also *LaG b'Omer*, literally the 33rd day of the omer. There are many legends and celebratory customs that have grown up around this day, which stands out among the 49 days of counting. One tradition is that this is the *yartzeit* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who was a student of the sage Rabbi Akiva. According to legend, Rabbi Shimon was the author of the *Zohar*, the kabbalistic text that is at the heart of our work with the *sefirot*. Today takes us as deeply as we can possibly go into the quality of submission, of humility in the face of What Is. And the power of the day is made even more profound by its connection to Rabbi Shimon, a holy ancestor whose guidance we can call upon as we dare to venture into deeper waters.

Today, whenever we feel ourselves reaching for our inner shield—closing ourselves off in protection—or reaching for our inner sword—striking out with aggression, we can gently call ourselves back to *hod*, to letting go of resistance and inviting. What is to pull up a chair and have some nice, cold lemonade. If what we're resisting is dangerous or threatening, we need to seek safety. But often our resistance arises out of our own shadows. Here we can practice letting go, giving over, releasing our grip, to let ourselves become vessels for a will greater than our own.

Kavannah/Intention:

Ribbono Shel Olam, Master of the Universe, today I invite hod, submission, into my experience of hod, letting go. Help me to go deeper into this practice of submitting to Your will. Help me to receive the teaching of my ancestors, who cultivated their hearts, minds and spirits to be so exquisitely attuned to Your will and to Your love. May my practice today be of service to You and to Your creation.

If it be Your Will

If it be your will
That I speak no more
And my voice be still
As it was before
I will speak no more
I shall abide until
I am spoken for
If it be your will

If it be your will
That a voice be true
From this broken hill
I will sing to you

From this broken hill
All your praises they shall ring
If it be your will
To let me sing
From this broken hill
All your praises they shall ring
If it be your will
To let me sing
If it be your will
If there is a choice
Let the rivers fill
Let the hills rejoice
Let your mercy spill
On all these burning hearts in hell
If it be your will
To make us well

And draw us near
And bind us tight
All your children here
In their rags of light
In our rags of light
All dressed to kill
And end this night
If it be your will

If it be your will.

-Leonard Cohen

Week 5 Day 6: Yesod she'b'Hod

Today is 34 days of the Omer, which is 4 weeks and 6 days of the Omer

Foundation within Submission

We're approaching the close of the *hod* cycle. I feel anticipation and also some loss - I'm going to miss being with *hod* so intimately. And paying closer attention to the small, daily challenges of giving over control and letting go of my efforts to shape things that are beyond me is sometimes really difficult and scary, and sometimes liberating and embracing.

Hod is recognized as the "seat of prophecy" in the system of the *sefirot*. As we bring *yesod*, foundation, into *hod* today, we are invited to explore prophecy. *Yesod* brings us within reach of the world of human existence-above, and aligned with *malchut*/manifestation, we can see the realization of *hod* in the world just ahead of us, but we're not there yet.

Abraham Joshua Heschel teaches that human actions have an impact on G-d—that G-d yearns for our closeness, our love, and our partnership in tending to the world and its life forms. Prophets, Heschel taught, were people who could sympathize deeply with both G-d *and* with other people. They could bring G-d's reality to people, and people's reality to G-d. "To the prophet," Heschel writes, "knowledge of G-d was fellowship with G-d, not attained by syllogism, analysis or induction, but by living together." (*The Prophets*, Harper Colophon, 1975, v.2, p. 3.)

Our dwelling in *hod* has been our time to touch "living together." By releasing our grip for a moment, maybe we've been able to sink into the will and consciousness of another being. What has it brought us? Where has it taken us? What would we like to bring with us into the realm of manifestation?

We each have our own "seat of prophecy" that we can call on and access. Like the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, sometimes the message is hard to hear, and even harder to live into. And sometimes the message comes on the wings of angels, lifting us to new heights of love and understanding.

Kavannah/Intention:

Ribbono Shel Olam, Master of the Universe, today I invite *yesod*, foundation, into my experience of *hod*, letting go. As I ready myself to bring this quality of *hod* into the world, help me to open my heart even wider to You. Help me to remember that I don't need to understand You in order to be with You. Help me to discern your loving whispers in the rustling of branches and the buzzing of bees. May my practice today be of service to You and to Your creation.

Week 5 Day 7: Malchut she'b'Hod

Today is 35 days of the Omer, which is 5 weeks of the Omer

Sovereignty within Submission

We arrive at the last day in the fifth week, the week of *hod*, the day of *malchut*/manifesting in the world.

The biblical figure associated with *hod* is Aaron. Moses' older brother and spokesperson, Aaron is an astonishingly complex character. While Moses is high on the mountain for forty days, receiving Torah from G-d, Aaron is down below building the golden calf. While Moses relates to G-d face-to-face, *panim-el-panim*, Aaron's path is performing elaborate ritual offerings in the tabernacle and the holy-of-holies. No-one else's clothes are described in such fabulous detail. No-one else is charged with running the messy, worldly work of slaughtering animals, sprinkling blood, sending the scapegoat into the wilderness, and effecting atonement for the entire people of Israel. While Abraham was directed to spare his son's life at the last moment, two of Aaron's four sons are struck dead when they offer "strange fire" in their first act as holy priests. Aaron, the talker, is a person and a prophet who lives his days so close to

G-d, and so splattered with the messiness of people living in the world.

So we turn to Aaron on this day of manifesting *hod* in the world, to remember that our lives are messy—there's no way around it. When *hod*, the sublime sense of splendor and connection to All that comes with letting go, manifests in the world, life will still be messy. But we will have touched something so powerful and filled with love that maybe the messiness feels a little different, a little less dangerous, a little easier to live with.

Kavannah/Intention:

Ribbono Shel Olam, Master of the Universe, today I invite malchut, manifestation in the world, into my experience of hod, letting go. I call on my ancestor Aaron to show me the paths where holiness and worldliness meet. Help me to receive the unpredictable, the unmanageable, the unexpected with a bit more ease and release. Help me to put on the special garment that was made just for me, and to wear it with grace and dignity as I draw nearer to You. Thank You for this week's experience and experiment with hod, with submitting to What Is. May my practice today be of service to You and to Your creation.

כֶּסֶה שָׁמַיִם הוֹדוֹ וַתְּהַלְתּוּ מְלֵאֵה הָאָרֶץ

The starry skies are G-d's splendor; G-d's song fills the earth!

— Habakuk 3:3b



The Sixth Week: Yesod

By Hazzan Shulamit Wise Fairman

Foundation, Bonding, Intimacy, Sensuality, Connectivity, Creativity, and Sexuality

Yesod is the lower tip of the triangle that includes and transcends the balance of Netzach and Hod. Moving from the Right Hip and Leg of Netzach to the Left Hip and Leg of Hod to Yesod- the belly, the womb, the locus of qi, the Hindu belly chakra, and the phallus in traditional kabbalistic writings.

Drawing on the balance of willfulness, an aspect of Netzech, and surrender, an aspect of Hod, Yesod is the FOUNDATIONAL still point thru which the essence of the Great Mystery shines thru us, enabling us to CONNECT! It's the sephira through which we cultivate our sense of inner peace and wholeness, so that we can direct our creative and sensual energy in the most clear and righteous way, cultivating deep connection with self, others, nature, and divinity.

Our journey through the Endurance, Willfulness, and Eternity of Netzah, balanced by the practice of Submission and Surrender to What Is of Hod, brings us to Yesod.

Yesod is a juicy journey into the realm of Right Relationship. With our willfulness and surrender in Balance, Yesod is the still (foundational) point through which the Great Mystery shines, and through which our creative and sensual desires bring us into connection.

The opportunities to fall out of integrity with the foundational relationships of our lives are many and varied. And yet the potential for deep healing, satisfying intimacy, integrity, and wholeness remains.

Yesod is the playground where our physicality and our spirituality meet, and in which we get to explore the quality of connection in our lives. This is the glorious challenge of Yesod - to be in covenantal relationship with the Divine in such a way that it is manifested in our relationships to ourselves, others, community, creation, and all existence. And the opposite is also true - to have our relationships to ourselves, others, community, creation, and all existence create the covenantal bridge to the Divine.

As we journey through the week of Yesod together, you may wish to choose a particular relationship to focus on for the

week, or for any day-- your relationship with yourself, with a beloved (friend, partner, family member, colleague...), with community (Kehilla, humanity...), with Creation (Gaia), or with any aspect of Divinity (YHVH, Shekhinah, Great Mystery...).

Week 6 Day 1: Chesed She'b'Yesod

Today is 36 days of the Omer, which is 5 weeks and 1 day of the Omer

Generosity within Connection

Chesed can be understood as Lovingkindness in the form of Generosity or Devotion.

And Yesod can be seen as the channel through which it becomes generative in our human experience.

“All you need is love, du du du du du...” If only it were that simple, and yet perhaps it is! On this day of Love within Foundation, let's explore this most fundamental aspect of our humanity, of our inherent divinity, and of our relationships. In our morning and evening prayers, we sing and meditate on the Great Love that flows forth to us. And then we focus on the spiritual and ethical imperative: To Love the Great Mystery, the Oneness of All.

How can we be more loving? How can we be more kind?

How might we open our selves to connect more deeply with the Source of Love in the Universe, and be vessels for transmitting it, sharing it, or being of service through it, as we tend to the relationship of our choosing?

Ribono Shel Olam, Masterful One of all Time and Space, we pray for your guidance in the quality of love that we bring to our relationships, the Foundations of our lives. If we are hardened to receive Love, help to soften our senses and know our inherent worthiness. If we are stingy to share it, help us trust in the abundant nature of Love's flow. May our experience of Connectedness be ever enhanced by our opening to Love, both given and received!

Week 6 Day 2: Gevurah She'b'Yesod

Today is 37 days of the Omer, which is 5 weeks and two days of the Omer

Boundaries within Connection

Every relationship benefits from boundaries or the strength of a structure through which the flow of love is directed or contained. On this day of the Omer, we consider what kind of boundaries enhance our experience of connection. The vows or agreements between lovers, the practice of Shabbat in relationship to our work week, the daily writing practice that gets us over the writer's block hump, the guidelines that make a community safe and welcoming, the confidentiality of therapeutic relationships.... these are but a few examples of boundaries or structures that can create space in which we cultivate meaningful connection. Inside these structures, we find freedom to express and experience the juiciness of living, the love that fuels our life force.

Have I relinquished boundaries that bring honor to myself or to others, for fear of rejection, failure, or loss of connection?

Have I leaned so heavily into setting boundaries that I have eclipsed opportunities to connect, to let the love flow?

Ribono Shel Olam, Masterful One of All Time and Space, Help us discern the boundaries of our relationships! We may flee from structure or commitment, but find ourselves lost in the sea of possibilities. We may hold fast to boundaries, unable to perceive the light of love or opportunity awaiting us. We may struggle to know ourselves and trust the truth of the YES or NO bubbling up within us. But we want to learn to channel the love in service of right relationship for strengthening our experience of connectedness!

Week 6 Day 3: Tiferet She'b'Yesod

Today is 38 days of the Omer, which is 5 weeks and three days of the Omer

The Heart of Connection

The ancient Israelite journey from the exodus of Mitzrayim, the Narrow Place, to receiving Torah on Mount Sinai, was a circuitous route. We were beginning to forge our peoplehood and our relationship with YHVH. Freedom from slavery was not for the purpose of having a limitless, undefined freedom, but to be free to live in service to the ONENESS of EXISTENCE.

We are still unlearning the constriction and the mental slavery of our past trials and traumas. Counting the Omer daily, we aim to refine aspects of our selves that prepare us to receive the great teachings of our lives.

Tiferet is the heart of compassion that balances the great love of Chesed with the strengthening boundaries of Gevurah. It aligns with Yesod through the central column of the sephirot. It is, perhaps, the inner-heart-work that lends itself to expression through the acts of intimacy, creativity, and connection that bring us into relationship, the realm of Yesod.

Today, as we consider a relationship in our lives, let us feel into the beauty of compassion and balance.

We when show up with an unresolved heart, or we're out of balance with our level of giving or guarding, whether to our own prayer practice or with our beloveds, we can struggle to see the reality of its rippling effect.

Ribono Shel Olam, Masterful One of All Space and Time, help us to bring our most compassionate selves forward to our relationships. Help us to be the Beauty and balance we seek in connection! May our inner work to know our truth serve to honor and magnify the quality of our relationships, that we may be in our most authentic and compassionate expression.

Week 6 Day 4: Netzach She'b'Yesod

Today is 39 days of the Omer, which is 5 weeks and four days of the Omer

Showing Up in Connectedness

Conscious relationships take time and effort, whether you're aiming for a lifetime or a season, and whether we're speaking of a creative process, the pursuit of justice, a daily conversation with God, or a friendship or partnership. It takes endurance to commit to the long arc of a relationship's unfolding, and this is the quality of Netzach within Yesod that we'll explore today.

Netzach challenges us to consider how the foundation of our connectivity is based not only on knowing the truth of our own hearts, but in persevering with the work of relationship that honors the process itself, not just a perceived end game, and it

honors the needs of the “other” we are relating with. For some of us, keeping our “eye on the prize” motivates us to keep on truckin’... and yet the prize itself can shift or be its own illusion of fulfillment. It may be all about the process, after all!

How do we keep showing up, even when the going gets tough, or the end result is understandably mysterious or surprisingly elusive?

What helps us connect to the eternal element that enlivens our relationships, and enables us to work towards their betterment?

Ribono shel olam, Masterful One of all Space and Time, help us to persevere and keep showing up to the ongoing work and play and exploration that our relationships require! May our own connection to our Source, our creativity, our sexuality, our life-force be a tremendous foundation from which we can act in service to our ongoing relationships.

Week 6 Day 5: Hod She’b’Yesod

Today is 40 days of the Omer, which is 5 weeks and 5 days of the Omer

Presence within Connection

There are moments of deep engagement that feel sublimely timeless, that give us a taste of complete and utter Presence with what IS. This quality of Hod allows our relationships to breathe and to benefit from the humility and gratitude that deep Presence cultivates.

In contrast to the ongoing efforting and visioning of the long ark that Netzach brings us, Hod invites us to receive or submit to

what IS along the way. It ain't always easy, or pretty, for that matter, but it's arguably the realist thing happening!

What confusions about our safety, our belovedness, or our inherent connectedness compel us to keep moving, stay vigilant and resist slowing down?

How might we cultivate a practice of taking time for gratitude, for spaciousness, for attuning ourselves to the ever-unfolding Presence that animates our lives and relationships?

Ribono Shel Olam, Masterful One of all Time and Space, Help us relax into the splendor of our connectedness! Help us practice letting go of agendas, goals, and expectations, to allow ourselves the gift of getting Present with What Is. May our spaciousness become a still point thru which the eternity in every moment shines through!

Week 6 Day 6: Yesod She'b'Yesod

Today is 41 days of the Omer, which is 5 weeks and 6 days of the Omer

Foundation within Foundation - Connection within Connection

This most magnified day of Yesod invites us to embody the juiciness of our aliveness, and to channel the spiritual energy and wisdom of all the sephirot spiraling down towards Yesod into our Foundation, the spring board of our lives lived in the reality of relationship.

A quick review of the lower triangle of sephirot as mapped on the body: Netzach is located in the right hip and leg, Hod is located in the left hip and leg, and Yesod is located in the locus of our life-force energy and sexual organs in between them. In Middle-Eastern dance, if your core (Yesod) is not strengthened

and activated, you can easily swing your hips out too far to the right (Netzach) or too far to the left (Hod). In relationship with anyone or anything, we, being human, often find ourselves out of balance, either swinging too much to the side of willing-persevering or too much on the side of surrendering-being, missing out on the deep wisdom and benefits of both.

Yesod sh'b'Yesod might just be saying: Hey, you- you magnificent creature! The quality of your Foundation, your ability to effectively channel your energy, will determine the quality of connectivity that you experience in relationship to all that Is. Be in the juiciness of your life with integrity, drawing from the wellspring of wisdom and energy that is sourced from the sacred.

Ribbono Shel Olam, Oh, Masterful One through all Space and Time, Help us to feel our aliveness, our life-force, and to ground ourselves in its righteousness and beauty. Help us to connect to one another, to our passion projects, to the natural world through our creativity and sensuality, experiencing meaningful, fun, safe and healthy relations!

Week 6 Day 7: Malchut She'b'Yesod

Today is 42 days of the Omer, which is 6 weeks of the Omer

Shekhinah within Connection/Foundation

We've come to the final day in our week of grounding ourselves in the foundation of our connectedness, Yesod. We turn our attention to Malchut-Shekhinah, the Indwelling Presence, the realization of the Divine through all existence.

Let us consider one of the profound ripple effects of coming into greater awareness of our own sacred foundation and life force energy-our consequently increased capacity to realize the

sacred nature of everything and everyone around us. The more fully we come into relationship from an I-Thou perspective, honoring the Godliness in ourselves and others, the more the love, the strength, the compassion, the integrity and the splendor of our relationships will be realized.

How does the Infinite, as wo/manifested through the finite, inform our experience of relationship? In what areas of our life are we less attuned to the sacred nature of things?

Perhaps we've underestimated the effect of bypassing certain relationships or their need for healing. Perhaps our relationship to food or sex or money, to our carbon footprint or our childhood trauma, to the media we expose ourselves to or to strangers in need, could use some elevated awareness and attention.

Ribbono Shel Olam, Masterful One of all Time and Space, Help us to experience the sublime nature of what may appear to be mundane! May our efforts to know ourselves and be in right relationship lay a foundation for the ongoing healing needed in our world. May we be guided and protected beneath the wings of Shekhinah, made ever more aware of the Sacredness of all Life.

The Seventh Week: Malchut/Shekhinah

By Rabbi Shifra Tobacman

Malchut means Sovereignty. This sefirah is also often called Shekhina, a name for God associated with Divine Presence. The word Shekhina is related to the word shochen, to dwell, and Shekhina is the in-dwelling Presence of the Divine in our lives.

Malchut / Shekhina can be thought of as the world around us, and also as the Divine living within us. When we focus on this sefirah, we take all the awareness built up to this point in our practice of counting the Omer, and consider the very ground we walk on, the air we breathe. We notice the life that breathes through each creature and plant, and the breath that keeps each of us alive. We pay attention to the Life that courses through each drop of water in the ocean, and that which courses through our bodies.

When we invoke awareness of the Shekhina during the last week of counting the Omer, I like to think that we are grounding ourselves for receiving whatever wisdom or insight will make its way to us, whatever personal Torah is ours to learn. We listen to the world and to the people around us, and we listen for the still small voice within that reminds us of... something ... whatever that something is for each of us, whatever that something is that we need to glean, or ask, or know - whatever it is we are needing to receive as we approach Shavuot, the pinnacle of our seven-week journey.

Week 7 Day 1: Chesed She'b'Malchut

Today is 43 days of the Omer, which is 6 weeks and 1 day of the Omer

Today begins the seventh and final week of our Omer counting. For me, there is often a bittersweet feeling at this time,

because I find Counting the Omer to be such a rich and rewarding experience and am a little sad to see it coming to an end. It is like walking to a destination and having all kinds of interesting and surprising experiences along the way, and even though the destination is still appealing and you are glad to be arriving, you are also sorry to see the journey there coming to an end.

But the teachings that have been shared on this site have been so satisfying. They have evoked awareness and awakening for body, mind, heart and soul. So as we enter the realm of *Malchut*, of sovereignty and Divine Presence, I invite you to open your heart and consider what you have experienced on the journey taken so far.

Contemplating the Journey

Consider the elements
required for the Omer counting journey.

Without *Chesed*, loving-kindness,
the discipline and strength of *Gevurah* can become harsh.
Without *Gevurah*,
Chesed's kindness can become so soft
it disappears.

Both are needed for the harmony that is *Tiferet*,
which holds the scaffolding in place,
allows for the enduring quality we call *Netzach*.

Without the endurance of *Netzach*
the splendor and gratitude of *Hod* would be short-lived
and we might not have time to discover
the humility experienced
in the face of our awe-inspiring world.

Awareness of *Hod* makes it possible

to be connected to the Divine in *Yesod*,
a foundational and creative force,
to be bound to Life
without being bound as slaves
and our freedom of spirit
carries us towards the majesty
of *Malchut*.

For today
the realm of creation rests on *Chesed*.
Through acts of random
and not-so-random kindness
we can remember,
kindness is ours, now and forever.

May kindness be a gift
you channel through the Divine
here at the 43rd Gate.

Week 7 Day 2 Gevurah She'b'Malchut
Today is 44days of the Omer, which is 6 weeks and 2
days of the Omer

Gevurah represents a kind of strength that comes from clear discernment of a situation or disciplined practice and learning of something. As our teacher Sandra Razieli said in her introduction to *Gevurah*, it is “essential for the health and well-being of our personal lives, our communities and the world.”

Gevurah increases our capacity to till the soil and reap the harvest of our own lives. Whether we are engaged in a course of study, a sport, a professional endeavor or a spiritual practice, *gevurah* gives shape to our pursuits, and makes it easier to discern the Presence of the Divine around us.

Poetic Meditation: A Prayer for Strength and Discernment

Gevurah is the fortitude it takes
to march into physical battle.

It is also well represented
by rows dug evenly and
amended with rich nutrients
in a previously rutty field.

It is the strength
of a disciplined martial artist
knowing just when, and how,
to approach and retreat,
to move energy, big or small
into the larger stream
or round itself until it falls.

And then there is the focused will
to stand against tyranny
without becoming a tyrant,
to advocate for those in need
without mistaking others' needs for our own,
to believe so deeply in justice
that we fight for it justly
without revenge as our motive.

Gevurah helps us to live each day
knowing how to stand tall in gravity,
and to hold one another firmly, lovingly
from within a deep groove of integrity.

When our disciplined *Gevurah*
is channeled into Life-Affirming Divine Presence
we can tell, we are tilling the soil
for consciousness, and new beginnings.

This is our prayer at the 44th gate.

Week 7 Day 3 Tiferet She'b'Malchut

Today is 45 days of the Omer, which is 6 weeks and 3 days of the Omer

Last week at this time, Hazzan Shulamit reflected on *Tiferet* of *Yesod* this way. “Freedom from slavery (in *Mitzrayim*) was not for the purpose of having a limitless, undefined freedom, but to be free to live in service to the ONENESS of EXISTENCE.”

A colleague once led a group of us in an exercise that seems to exemplify today's pairing of *Tiferet* (balance, harmony) within *Malchut* (Divine Presence). We sat in a circle. He took a deep breath in and let it out slowly with the chanted syllable “ohhhhh”. During his chant, he indicated for the next person to start, and during that person's chant, he indicated for the next person to start, and so on. We continued that way for some time, going around the circle several times, each taking our individual breath in and making our individual “ohhhh” sound as we breathed out. Waves of sound emerged, an intermingling of breath and voices. At first the sounds were not all in tune with each other, but as we continued we found a place of attunement, a place of harmony.

And then, as we continued longer, the notes merged. We moved from Attunement to At-One-ment. The harmony of our discreet voices had blended into a single note. And “ohhhh”, what an awesome surprise.

Musical harmony is a sharing of breath channeled consciously. Sometimes we can breathe our way to awareness of the Oneness of Existence. *Tiferet* of *Malchut*.

Week 7 Day 4 Netzach She'b'Malchut

Today is 46 days of the Omer, which is 6 weeks and 4 days of the Omer

Today's pairing of qualities is *Netzach* (Endurance) of *Malchut* (Divine Presence).

Netzach is what keeps us going even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

Poetic Meditation: Remembering the Enduring Nature of Divine Presence

Life, short as it is,
is a long journey.

What gives us endurance
for the duration?

Religious observers of many faiths would say,
"God gives me the strength to go on."

But what happens when we are not so sure about God,
or when we don't believe in God at all?

What gives us the strength to re-connect
to the spirit of life and living?

When we practice enduring love
we witness Divine Presence in our lives.

Netzach is the endurance of the sun,
brilliant, lasting.

Even when night comes
or there is a storm
and it goes out of sight

the sun is still there
informing life on earth.

Even if we don't understand
exactly how it works
the sun's rays are a required element
for us to breathe.

Breathe in the sun's enduring nature
and know it lives in you
even as you breathe it back out.

The plants and trees breathe it in
and recycle it back to you.

This is the 46th gate.

Week 7 Day 5 Hod She'b'Malchut.

Today is 46 days of the Omer, which is 6 weeks and 5 days of the Omer

As we near the end of the Omer journey, I find wonder just what it means to remain open to a sense of Divine Presence in the world around us. How I can continue to notice the signs of wisdom, to witness the unfolding of Torah that comes when we pay attention?

Today's pairing of qualities is *Hod* (splendor, humility, gratitude) of *Malchut* (Divine Presence). Or, we might say, *Hod* in the face of *Malchut*.

Once when doing chaplaincy in a hospital, I met an 83 year-old woman whose body was riddled with cancer and who was being treated for complications. She had a remarkably positive attitude about the whole ordeal, and expressed a great deal of

gratitude for the many people who supported and loved her. I asked what made it possible for her to remain so positive in the face of her difficult situation.

“It inspires people,” she said, “and that makes me feel I am being of service to God.” I was so touched, and so grateful to have shown up in that moment, to have experienced the awesome inspiration of this woman’s gift. I love these small simple moments, the ways our surroundings, or other people’s experiences, enter our own and make us say, “Oh, I am so glad to have been present for this, present to You.” One of my chaplain colleagues taught me a song by Becky Karush that aptly expresses gratitude at being present to Divine Presence.

Halleluyah, here I am, here I am. Halleluyah, here I am, here I am. Let it rain, let it shine, let it snow, I don't mind. Halleluyah, here I am, here I am.

Week 7 Day 6 Yesod She'b'alchut Today is 48 days of the Omer, which is 6 weeks and 6 days of the Omer

Today’s pairing is *yesod* (foundation, connection) of *malchut* (divine presence).

I am reminded of the practice of putting on *tefillin*, sometimes known as phylacteries in English. Whether we individually engage in this practice or not, we can imagine the intimacy and sense of connection the ancient ritual inspires. When people wear *tefillin* to make morning prayers they are symbolically binding themselves to Holy One-ness.

For many years I found this practice odd at best, even distasteful at times. It didn’t seem to have anything to do with the way I thought about Judaism, God or the world around me. And as someone who grew up in a non-religious home, it seemed

like an antiquated vestige of earlier generations. I associated it exclusively with the Orthodox men I had seen do it, and wanted to separate myself from that sort of Jewish practice. But then in recent years I began to notice more people in the liberal and progressive Jewish world wearing *tefillin* for morning prayers, including a number of women and queer people. As more people included themselves in the circle of this tradition, the tradition itself became transformed in my heart and mind. I found myself feeling less distant from the generations of Jews who have done this *mitzvah*, more included, more embraced.

At a certain point in the donning of *tefillin*, the practitioner recites the words below, phrases that evoke Love in our lives. I like to recite these lines when putting on my wedding ring each day, reminding me of both my enduring love for my wife, and the holiness of our relationship.

I will betroth you to me forever
(*v'erastich li l'olam*)
I will betroth you to me in righteousness and justice
(*v'erastich li b'tzedek u'v'mishpat*)
and loving-kindness and compassion
(*u'v'chesed, u'v'rachamim*)
I will betroth you to me with faithfulness
and in union with these essential qualities
you will know Y-H-V-H, the Unfolding of Being.
(*v'erastich li b'emunah, v'yada-at et Y-H-V-H.*)

Poetic Meditation: Connecting to Each Other, Connecting to *Malchut*

Ask yourself today
how do we be,
and how do we create,
holy beloveds?

Walk through the 48th gate and notice any answers that arise throughout the day.

Week 7 Day 7 Malchut She'b'Malchut
Today is 49 days of the Omer, which is 7 weeks of the Omer

It is hard to believe that the last day of counting the Omer has arrived. Within hours it will be Shavuot, when we commemorate the receiving of Torah.

This day is represented by *Malchut of Malchut*. It is a day to consider the Divine Presence around us (Sovereignty, Nobility) and the Divine Presence within us (*Shekhina*). It is a time to consider our own place in the world, our relationship to the Divine and to one another. We might imagine standing at the top of a mountain. From here we can look out at the journey we have taken, the one towards which we are headed, and the one we see when we focus in on whatever is happening in this moment, in this place, right now.

Perhaps in doing this, and in gleaning the lessons from the last 49 days, we can even get a glimpse of our own best selves.

Poetic Meditation: Divine Presence All Around Us, Divine Presence Within

This Gate is Ha-makom,
The Place, Divine Presence
in the world around us.

It is Every Place.
It is our shared Sovereignty.

Our true human inheritance

is shared nobility
with all people and peoples,
such awe of each other's beauty
that we are humbled and inspired
to abiding love
for the earth that sustains us all.

This very place you are in
is noble and you
can be noble within it.

What are you like as a noble being?

What desires do you have,
what kind of love?

What sustains you?
What keeps you humble?

What is your personal task in this life?
What journey are you on?
Who are your fellow and sister travelers?

What can you do today
to demonstrate your own nobility
or unmask the divine spark
in another's eyes?

This is the entry point
to the 49th gate,
to revelation,
and new beginnings.



Appreciations

In 2013 Sharon Grodin led Kehilla Community Synagogue in an experiment with blogging the Omer. Seven people each addressed one week of the Omer counting, offering teachings and intentions for each day of that week:

Howard Hamburger, Kehilla Spiritual Leader - Chesed

Sandra Razieli, Kehilla Spiritual Leader - Gevurah

Rabbi David J. Cooper, Kehilla Community Rabbi - Tiferet

Rabbi Diane Elliot, Kehilla member - Netzach

Rabbi Dev Noily, Kehilla Associate Rabbi - Hod

Hazzan Shulamit Wise Fairman, Kehilla Music Director - Yesod

Rabbi Shifra Tobacman, Kehilla member - Malchut

Sharon Grodin edited and posted the offerings online, also sending daily updates to subscribers. In 2016 Shoshana Finacom painstakingly pulled the text from Kehilla's website and collected it in a document. In 2017 Dev Noily edited the text and formatted it for this booklet.

We offer our gratitude to all who had a hand in creating this guide, to the Kehilla community that inspired it, to the ancestors—ancient and close—who taught us this tradition. And to the Holy One of Blessing, the energy of life, may the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts bring us into growing alignment with You and with all creation.