

B'midbar 5782 (June 3, 2022)

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“I am going to count to five and then you are going to give me that thing that you are not supposed to have.”

This is a sentence I find myself saying a lot lately to our two-year-old.

I am grateful that she still complies—most of the time. Even if she isn't thrilled about the idea, she will hand it over. But not until I count. Sometimes, she even *asks* for me to count.

What is it about counting that changes her willingness to comply? She definitely still wants whatever it is that she has. For Eliana, my counting is a buffer; those last few moments give her a chance to appreciate something and prepare to give it up. It allows for transition.

Tonight is the final night we count the Omer. For almost seven weeks now, we have been Jewishly counting each day as we head from slavery in Egypt at Passover toward the freedom to worship God and receive the 10 Commandments at Shavuot. We count to mark time and give ourselves the opportunity for reflection and growth. We create space for transition, knowing that living in slavery is very different than living as free people.

For the past seven years, I have been counting the omer with my chevruta, Rabbi Dusty Klass. The practice has become more and more meaningful for me over the years; I ground myself in Jewish time and appreciate each moment in the present. Time moves so rapidly; counting each day allows me to pause and be conscious of it. With thanks to social media, I can look back at previous years of omer counting and remember where I was at this time in the year but at different points in my life.

This year, the counting of the omer has been particularly valuable as these past seven weeks have been extra full. Packing an entire house and moving six beings (two adults, two kids, and two dogs) from North Carolina to New York has been a challenge even when it means, in some ways, returning to a place I know. Every night, after I put the girls to bed, I paused in the midst of the chaos of boxes and packing tape and bubble wrap to sit down, color the omer, and ponder the question or prompt my omer coloring book presented. This year, my practice of counting the omer has given me the time and space for my own transition.

How perfect, then, it is, for me to be standing here on the bimah at Westchester Reform Temple as the newest member of the clergy team. It is a transition point for me both personally and professionally; many of you know that I grew up here and have delivered a d'var Torah or two over the years. But tonight is the first time I do so as the Director of the Jewish Learning Lab. I am grateful to all of you who have already helped with this transition and I look forward to building relationships with many more of you in the coming weeks and months.

In this week's Torah portion, B'midbar, we see another kind of Jewish counting. Moses is instructed *שאו את ראש כל עדת בני ישראל*, 'take a census of the whole Israelite community.' Moses, however, has very specific qualifications for who actually counts in this census. The purpose of his counting is military preparedness. And in counting only the men who are twenty years or older, Moses leaves out a *lot* of people. People who we would most certainly count in 2022— be it for military preparedness or any other reason. So tonight, as we also celebrate Pride, we take note of how people counted—or didn't—biblically, and we make sure to count and celebrate and appreciate all members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Pride month began as a commemoration of the Stonewall Uprising, a series of spontaneous demonstrations by members of the gay community in response to a police raid that began in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village. The police raid was allegedly related to liquor license issues, but the larger issue was that gay and lesbian people had nowhere safe to gather. In 1969, they fought back. And every year since, in honor and memory of those events, the LGBTQ+ community has come together in celebration; showing up in community to remind the world: we count - *every* person counts, and is deserving of the same rights, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, or socioeconomic status.

Beginning in 1999, the United States has named June as Pride Month, an opportunity to come together across the country to show support, allyship, and partnership with the LGBTQ+ community; to make sure that this population knows that they count. We all count. Each of us counts.

And so, I will close tonight by inviting you to join me in counting the omer for the last time this year. The tradition is not to say the number we are counting until after the blessing, so I will tell you that last night was 48 days of the omer.

The blessing begins with the familiar formula and ends with the words “*al sfirat ha’omer*”.

היום ארבעים ותשה שהם שבע שבועות לעמר.

Today is forty nine days which is seven weeks of the omer.