

## RABBI'S MESSAGE

### COUNTING TIME AND REMEMBERING

This is a very special time. For seven weeks, from 15 Nissan-6 Sivan on the Hebrew calendar (April 20-June 8 this year) is the time marked as “counting the Omer.” An omer is a unit of measure, an amount of grain that was brought to the Temple as an offering. In the days of the Temple, counting the grain each day helped prepare for the harvest. More importantly, it is a link between Passover, which commemorates freedom from oppressive slavery in Egypt, and Shavuot, which commemorates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Passover and Shavuot are two of the three holidays that are listed in the Torah for people to make a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem (Sukkot is the third). Taking this time between Passover and Shavuot reminds us that redemption from slavery was not complete until we received the Torah.

Counting grain, preparing for harvest and making pilgrimages are no longer part of our practice since the destruction of the Holy Temple; but counting the days is still part of Jewish practice. It is a time of partial mourning and reflection. During the counting of the omer, traditional Jews do not get married, don't engage in parties with dancing and don't cut their hair or shave. There are many interpretations and explanations for this. Some relate it to a plague that occurred during the time of Rabbi Akiva in the first century of the common era. According to legend, the plague ended on the 33<sup>rd</sup> day of counting. Day 33 (today called “Lag B'Omer”) became a break in the mourning – a day of celebration and picnics before returning to a spiritual preparation to receive the Ten Commandments. To this day, people commemorate Lag B'Omer with parties, picnics and some observant Jews even choose it for their wedding day! Temple Beth Torah will be having our own Lag B'Omer Barbeque on Sunday, May 19 (see page 8 in this newsletter).

Modern Israel has added another observance of remembrance during the counting of the omer. In 1951, the Knesset established 27 Nissan as Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day. At TBT, we once again invite cantorial soloist Anita Bonnano, whose own parents were Holocaust survivors, to help lead our remembrance service on May 3. We are also fortunate to have *four generations* from one family of survivors who will be present. Louise Joskowitz will be joined by her daughter, Pepi, her grandson, Aaron (who was a teenage student of mine at Beth Yeshurun 25 years ago), and his three children. We mourn the devastation and the suffering of the most horrific time and celebrate that Hitler's goal of eliminating the Jewish people failed. We are honored to have Mrs. Joskowitz visit our temple with her great-grandchildren, and eager to learn from her story.

All remembrance includes the mixed emotions mourning what we've lost while celebrating what we've had. Immortal words from the Book of Job remind us “G-d gives, G-d takes away, blessed be the name of G-d.” We celebrate our freedom on Passover, while also pouring out drops of wine to honor the suffering of others. The seven weeks of the omer is a good time to remember our challenges and count our blessings at the same time.

L'shalom,

*Rabbi Dan Gordon*